

DUST BY YAËL DAYAN

New Face in the Mirror heralded Yaël Dayan as a promising young novelist. *Envy the Frightened* confirmed the young Israeli's reputation. And here, in her third novel, is evidence of Miss Dayan's continuing growth as a writer.

To the desert comes a handful of pioneers who are to build a city—among them Yardena, a young girl who views the undertaking as a new, engaging, and purely temporary experience. Unlike the others in her midst, Yardena has reached the age of twenty-three untouched by tragedy or disappointment. Having grown up in a verdant Israeli village in an atmosphere of love and comfort, her life and that of her family had never been endangered. No part of Yardena's world had ever been destroyed. "It would be dishonest," she says, "to pretend that I went because I wanted to turn the desert into a garden or to realize dreams that were thousands of years old. I went because it was different, because I had nothing else to do, because it was a road that might have an end. I knew I would take the road back one day."

It is through Yardena's eyes that we see the city emerging from dust and come to know the people who deeply affect her
(continued on back flap)



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DUST

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By Yaël Dayan

NEW FACE IN THE MIRROR

ENVY THE FRIGHTENED

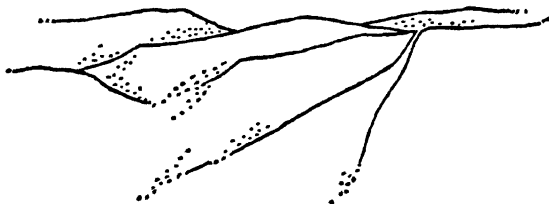
DUST

YAËL DAYAN

DUST

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CLEVELAND AND NEW YORK



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PART 1

DUST

The city was yellow and its substance was dust. Its pulse beat was infinity and it had no name as yet. They called it "the new city," but there was something ancient and immense in its nonexistence, in its smallness.

It lay there in our imagination between the plan and reality, the said and the committed, the desired and the possible, like a hallucination of color and structure and towers and streams, each of us being privileged to add to it streets and directions, atmospheres and characters, curves and angles. For the time being, there were a few huts, the huge electric generator, the water pump, and a small café.

The dust road was there too, the southern wind at night, the truck bringing supplies every morning, more dust, more yellow, darker yellow toward sunset, heavier dust that buried under it the stones, the sounds, the horizon, our footprints and the signs of our energy.

The stone-man was there first. Not because he came to the city but because the city came to him. When the first people came to measure the area, they told him he would have to move his hut.

When they looked inside, it seemed less easy because of the stones.

There were heaps of stones there, of all sizes and shapes and colors. Some were systematically arranged in rows and some scattered. In the center of the hut, there was a large, shaped marble and on it were displayed smaller colored stones.

"What are these for?" the men who came to measure the area asked.

He smiled. "Stones," he said. He touched some. He took some small ones out of his shabby trouser pocket. "Here, look at these. Touch them, feel them. Look at their shape! I named the one in the corner the Lion, and this one is the Prophet." He gestured toward a triangular gray pillar: "And the round one over there is called Forgiveness." He stared up. They were not looking. He felt apologetic for a moment and dug out a red soft chalk stone. "Here, my best," he said. "No name yet, but it is my favorite." No, he decided, they weren't listening, and he started walking toward the canyon, eyes lowered, examining and searching. He seemed to know every square inch of this dead soil, to have classified every grain of sand and to have talked to the thirsty cracks in it.

"Hey, you. Stop!"

He looked back. A small sweaty fat man approached him.

"What are you anyway—a sculptor or something?"

He smiled with forgiveness. "No, they are ready-made. Some devil, or the wind or the years do it for me. I gather them, live with them, scatter them when I know them well and look for new ones—a kind of stone-man. I've been here for a few months only. There is a lot to do. Excuse me." And he turned away to go.

"You'll still have to move your hut. We plan to build a shopping center where it is now."

But the stone-man didn't hear. He bent down gently; his large tanned hand picked up a white marble, cleaned it, and his eyes brightened with laughter— "I've seen you before!"—and he laid it gently in the sand.

Before Leni—for that was his real name—came to the city site, he occupied a small shack in Beer-sheba. All that his neighbors knew was that he had immigrated from Poland, spoke some Hebrew and kept to himself. He was seen once or twice talking to the children, and once late at night drinking heavily with a girl on his lap. But this never recurred, and he remained a mystery which nobody was interested enough to try to solve.

Then he started gathering wood and calling himself the wood-man. Driftwood from the wadis, olive trunks, dried-up branches which he piled in his courtyard which was enclosed by a wooden fence he built. Occasionally he showed the precious pieces of wood to the curious; they were

all named and classified, and represented figures, objects, thoughts and fantasies.

He was an ugly man, tall and large and heavy, with kind blue eyes, hard thin lips and a crooked nose. His hair was the color of the desert and he never wore a shirt or shoes.

One hot summer day, people noticed a fire. Leni was sitting in his yard burning the pieces of wood he had collected, fascinated by the flame and engrossed with the breaking, hesitant sounds the wood made burning. He became the fire-man, and people said he was mad. For one whole day and night he sat there watching the flames and destroying the figures and images, tearing the fence apart, burning it and staring stolidly at the ashes carried by the southern wind. His face and chest were sweating and everyone thought he would end by burning his hands and arms, which also looked like strong branches. But when he threw the last piece into the fire—and it was his favorite olive trunk, called *The Regretful Devil*—it was dawn. He took a small bag from the shack, shut the door, stepped on the dying flames, and red-faced and not looking back once, he started walking toward the outskirts of the town. He crossed the valley and the asphalt road into the desert and disappeared over the horizon.

When Leni was alone, he stooped to pick up the first stone, put it casually in his pocket, and became the stone-man.

He couldn't explain what made him choose the particular site he did. It was near enough to the Bedouin tents, and he fetched his water from their well. The deep canyon obviously had something to do with it, and he did not know that they were planning to build our city there.

I asked him once about his collections, and he had an answer. A woman betrayed him once. Then he sailed the sea, and his ship was wrecked. He would have liked to collect stars, and did it in his imagination, lying on his back at night. He never slept indoors; he wanted nature to be his. "If I could pull people to little pieces, and touch and feel and place and name each piece, I would know them. But I cannot. So, I am frightened. The same with the sea. But wood and stones are different, like knowing and conversing, naked and with honesty. I trust the stones. I feel secure with them, not possessive. I don't want to own them, just to touch their hearts."

He had the ability to ignore people without hurting them, and when we were all there, it was still his desert, and we all felt we did not exist, or only in our imaginations, and the reality was his, his tent and eyes and song at times, and if we didn't exist for him, we weren't really there. We almost wanted to be collected by him, placed on top of his heap of stones, be named and felt and thus belong.

I envied Leni, as I envy some remote tribes

who never wear clothes, as I envy children or the swift carefree movement of the elegant gazelles in the desert. It was the kind of envy that breeds not hatred but sadness. He didn't mind me around, and he talked to me. I had the feeling that he had cornered the world, stripped it naked into this yard, into the red sandstone, and owned it. I felt he grasped the world, and therefore could let go of it, leave it or take it, while I was hopelessly brushing against its blind surface and so hooked to it forever, hanging like a pin from a magnet, doomed to try and swallow while all I could do was lick. Leni's world was complete and wholesome and balanced; mine was mediocre and patched, and I was jealous of Leni.

Leni represented what we had to face, and by being there he made it easier for us. We were to build something new and complete. We were to start living, those of us who had never done so before, those who had lived too much and did not believe in life, those who knew death and those who feared it; we were to meet life.

We were to overcome nature, to conquer reality—and yet not indulge in dreams. We were to realize dreams, not by invading as outsiders, but by absorbing the desert and its terrifying futile magic into the cells of our skins and the corridors of our brains, and by absorbing it conquer it. But Leni was beyond this—he was already a part of the scenery.

Yes, Leni was a miniature desert in his massiveness and in his innocence, in his silence and aloofness. Somehow the desert had Leni's blue eyes. The desert had Leni's secrecy; and at times I believed that it was dust and sandstorm and hot winds that flowed through Leni's veins instead of blood, and that the desert ignored us as he did.

The city site was high, but isolated. On three sides lay the canyon, and it seemed like the end of the earth. You'd arrive from the north and walk toward the horizon, and you'd have to stop. The abrupt sudden slopes, the abyss, the depth of red and green rocks stretched vertically as far as the eye could see—and there, at the bottom, was another world. Our desert was like a huge animal, eternal, yet always unpredictable. It would wake up gently in the morning, and lazily rise and overcome the day. It would rest in the afternoon, rest like the dead, to reawaken with the sunset which brought the breeze and the southerly wind, like a lion shaking its fur and mane, and frighten the humans into shelters. Then it would relax with the first stars, howl softly to remind God of its existence, and die again with the cold night till the next dawn.

But this was the secret of the desert, and its cheating quality. It was never really dead and never really safe. It pretended to be blind, watching us with a thousand eyes; it pretended to be dumb, talking in all languages; and it pretended

to be deaf while hearing with a million ears. Our desert demanded more than it gave. It was never loyal, yet it stripped us naked and demanded honesty of us. It hid behind cracks and corners; yet for us there was no shelter, no corner to hide in. We were trapped and chained with strips of heat and sand, and doomed to be silhouetted always against unfelt skylines, lit with lights blazing straight in our faces, to walk alone and helpless. The only two alternatives were the road back, away to the greens and blues—or the crater below, with its inviting depth which looked like a huge cruel winking eye.

When we arrived with the truck one Sunday morning toward the end of the summer, these two awaited us suspiciously—Leni and the desert.

It would be dishonest to pretend that I went because I wanted to turn the desert into a garden or to realize dreams that were thousands of years old. I went because it was different, because I had nothing else to do, because it was a road that might have an end. I knew I would not stay forever; I never thought of tying my future to this newness; I knew I would take the road back one day, but perhaps carrying with me a particle of the night's silence, or the day's honesty.

There were a few people with me on the truck: the architect, his two assistants, and a woman. There were several cars with equipment follow-

ing us, and in a few weeks' time the immigrants and a group we referred to as "the pioneers" were due.

At the beginning, as the truck rolled smoothly down the asphalt path, we made polite conversation, introducing ourselves, commenting on immediate plans and so on, but the minute the driver shifted into second gear and took a right turn, hesitantly following a dirt road, we stopped talking.

We were drinking in the scenery, avoiding each other's eyes and refraining from reactions. The woman fascinated me. It was apparent that this was her first encounter with the sense of space you get from the area. She was engulfed by it, her eyes wide and her mouth slightly open. Her hands, which before had played restlessly with a shabby scarf, were now holding the truck rails tightly, and her face gained a dimension of relaxed beauty. The architect gazed into the distance with confidence, as if he owned the area. The assistants, who had been there before, respected our silence and simply waited for the journey's end, wiping the sweat off their necks and foreheads occasionally. I knew the desert and was merely filled with joy to be once again in this free, unlimited space. But the woman—she looked as if she were the only human left in the world after a terrible disaster, strong and expectant, and frightened. She was going home. I knew

that for her it was a one-way trip and the end of a long journey. As we approached the cliff, and were already gathering our baggage, she did not notice our movements. For a moment, it looked as if she were waiting for the truck to go on behind the cliff and fly up higher into the clouds. I touched her arm. She was perspiring and shivered at my touch.

"We can't go any further, so I suppose that this is it," I said. She nodded.

A few of the trucks with supplies were there already, and the workers who had come for the first few days were busy setting up tents. The woman was searching for something. She walked alone, having left her bundle of clothes behind a tent—first straight to the cliff, her hair blown by the wind, then back, and away again—nervously, silently. I spoke to her. "I came to find Leni," she said, and moved on. But Leni was not there, and if he had been, he would not have wanted to be disturbed.

We were all busy, and toward sunset the trucks and the workers drove off. A loneliness came down, a sudden loneliness which recurred every evening, when the human melted and disappeared, and the gigantic night mastered all, when we all became insignificant ghosts and other forces took over. We crowded together. In front of the big tent which we named the Sunset Café, we built a small fire and prepared for the night.

It was a strange evening, our first one. The woman was preparing the dinner; the architect and his assistants were going over the plans once again; a worker amused himself with a small transistor radio which poured elongated jazz tunes into the crater, without meaning or echo, lost and lonely sounds. I sat in front of the fire as the night's chill drove away the last remains of the heat and sweat, wondering whether the city, when built of houses and planted with trees, would still disappear nightly in the same way, when Leni came toward us. We stopped talking or moving and looked up.

He was in a friendly mood, introduced himself, shook hands with the architect, greeted me—we had met before in Beersheba—and looked at the woman.

He went toward her, slowly, lifted his large right hand and gently stroked her hair, her shoulder and her arm. "Go back, Rita, don't stay here," he said. "This is not for you. I am lost. I have sold my soul to this devil, but you should go back."

He was very gentle. We didn't dare move; we wanted to hear every word and didn't dare listen. The radio was flooding us with a quick rhythm now and the woman smiled at us, apologizing, and returned to her work. Leni sat down near me and poured out the contents of his small bag—stones. He sorted them into small groups, commenting occasionally on their quality or color. He looked

at the architect, and winking at me asked him: "Is it true that you have come to build a town here?"

"You know we have."

"Tell me about it. After all, I am its first citizen."

"Surely. Come and see the plans." Leni looked at the large sheet of paper handed to him. There were squares and lines and purple marks, occasional numbers, and some large squares inside which were written Hospital, School, Cinema, Factory, Shopping Center.

"And you will have all these?"

"Yes, and more. Twenty thousand people in the next seven years, at least five big factories, and a school which will serve the whole area." The architect became enthusiastic. He got up and gestured with a broad movement: "Here we shall have a large garden with cafés in the center, a modern hospital, and to the right the residential area. In two years the place will look like a town and you won't recognize it."

"What about the desert, the sandstorms, the dryness?"

"We will bring water and electricity. We will make the desert crawl like a baby beneath our feet. We'll choke it with trees and tie down the dust with roots and . . ."

"What will happen to the children?"

"What about them?"

"The cliff. It's dangerous for children at night."

The architect pointed to a red line on the paper. "We'll build a fence, a railing, and a wide road in front where families will walk in the evenings and enjoy the panoramic view in safety."

Leni smiled. "It's like building a ladder to the moon," he said. "No fence will hold or be long enough, and you don't know the tempting powers of depth. It summons me every night, but there are still some stones I don't know. . . ."

"Well, don't worry. Everything will be looked after. Let's have some food. Say, what's this woman's name? She came to look for you. Is she your wife or something?"

I knew Leni would not answer, but he didn't even smile. "Her name is Rita," he said, and moved to take his stones, waved good night to us and walked away. Later we saw a small fire near his remote tent, and heard the click-clack sound of stones being arranged and thrown and piled. It sounded like the war warnings of ancient tribes, sharp and monotonous and irritating.

We ate in silence, and decided to retire early. The next day would be a busy one for all. I was sharing a tent with Rita and we took a kerosene lamp and went in. We unpacked the sleeping bags and put out the light. Rita undressed. She was wearing black lace underwear and her body was full and round. She wrapped herself in a dressing gown and lit a cigarette.

"I am restless and not sleepy," she said. "It's not so simple to decide to change your life."

"What did you do in Beersheba?"

"Oh, nothing. I only immigrated two years ago from Hungary. We escaped during the revolution, and as my husband was killed—he was Jewish, I am not—I thought I'd come over. He talked a lot about Israel, knew some people who left before us . . . Do I bore you?"

I shook my head and she continued: "I came to Tel Aviv. My husband's friends were surprised and not very friendly. Not unkind, just not too friendly. So I studied the language and was offered a flat in Beersheba. I met some women there who were also doing nothing. I had some money and then sold my jewels. I met Leni too. He didn't want me, and then he did, and then he didn't again, and I heard he was here, so I came. Excuse me for talking, but we'll have to spend some time together. I was told I could open a café here. They will help me. I want to work, to meet new people. . . ." She ground out the cigarette. "I'm not used to this emptiness. It makes me restless. Why did you come here?"

I mumbled something about being attracted to new experiments and the desert. She stood up. "I'll go out for a walk since I can't sleep yet. Good night."

She left the tent and readjusting her dressing gown walked toward the other light. Leni was

sitting in front of his tent sipping coffee and holding his red sandstone. He took no notice of her. She touched his shoulder but he did not move.

"Please look at me." He looked up, and again stroking her hand, stared at the fire and said: "Go away, Rita. I know it hurts to love. You don't know how it hurts to *be* loved. Believe me, there is nothing I can give you, or anyone, and there is nothing that I want to receive. Go away, Rita."

She had pride in her plea, and was stubborn in her defeat. She walked away from him. It was he who turned to watch her, and she knew he was watching.

The architect was now walking toward her, and this empty endless space seemed crowded. He was smoking a pipe and looking friendly. "Aren't you cold?" She was. He offered her a jacket and they walked together for a few moments.

"I shouldn't have asked him about you. I am sorry. I am too curious."

"No, never mind. It's natural—we are so few. I am not his wife and never will be. We've met before, that's all. He doesn't mix with people, men or women. He lives elsewhere."

"You hate him?"

"I love him."

"I see. Well, if you insist on staying you might be cured. Many new faces, the exhaustion, the heat, the change, the work. We'll help you set up the café. He'll probably detest the noise and

leave soon. You should stay with us. Sleep well, Rita."

She returned to our tent on tiptoe so as not to waken me. "I'm not asleep. Had a nice walk?"

"He doesn't want me." She was saying it to herself. "I knew he wouldn't and yet I hoped. I'll never ask him again."

She took off her gown and slid into the sleeping bag. I pretended to be asleep but could see her taking a small bottle out of her bag, sipping slowly from it—the smell of liquor spread in the small tent. She corked the bottled, sighed, and spent a restless night.

At dawn, the noise invaded the desert like a mistake. Hammers and trucks unloading, voices shouting orders, and bulldozers. We dressed and moved out to see the scene changing. The vehicles from the north, which had been on the road the whole night, arrived, and the area was spotted with workers and machines. Huge heaps of gravel and cement, immense water tankers, pipes, wooden constructions ready to be put together, equipment—it was all there, pushing away the magic, filling the imagination with cement, and blocking the view with barricades. The huge teeth of the bulldozers dug into the virgin waste land, and the ditches, like jaws, smiled in mockery as the sand slid back to fill them up. The tap of the water tank was leaking and the soil drank it

thirstily, for the first time, as it drank the sweat of the workers, and, in a fast moment, swallowed it all, not allowing a mark to be left.

We made coffee and breakfast for the architect and his crew and shared their excitement. The prefabricated houses would be up in a few days; the immigrants would come in a few months to find the city ready and awaiting them. "And your café," he said to Rita, "will be soon ready too. I can't wait for the cakes!" She smiled. I thought she was happy.

Leni was not seen during the whole of that day—or was he the dark spot I saw moving down in the crater, away from the activity and the conquest?

We were planting trees on marked spots, to hold the sand. Reluctantly I pushed the weak plants into the holes, reluctantly I gave each its share of sweet water. Rita, next to me, said, "Bless you" to each tree. I felt wicked. "Many will die," I said. "It's a hard fight."

"For us, too," she answered, and went on with her work.

The trees we planted looked pathetic, like fingers of buried people. The green was out of place, like the machines and the people; and toward evening the sound of the generator and the electric light were added to it. In this weak yellow steady light, brightening narrow circles here and there, faces looked fragile and wan, and ob-

jects dull. The lamps swayed with the wind, but the sound of the generator was stronger than the night's delicate sounds, and hushed even the clicking noise of Leni's stones. He had built a fire as before, and I found myself walking toward it as to a shelter.

"So, they've made it. Are you going to stay?"

"For a while," he said, smiling. He understood. "You are unfair though. You really don't know. You want the plants to die, and you've never seen dead children. You want the light to fade, and you have never been in darkness. You want the desert to win, like I do, but you've never seen defeated, broken people. No, we are unfair. We have no right to judge, only to go away. It's like finding slums picturesque, or crime attractive, or whores with a golden heart genuine—like Rita is."

"Don't call her a whore!"

"You see? What's wrong with being a whore? She is one, always was, and always will be. I met her in a whorehouse and in no time she'll add a similar institution to the new city."

"She loves you."

"Unfortunately. She is kind. I was kind to her—a mistake. The rest is her imagination. I won't talk, but sooner or later someone will come who knows her, and she will be branded. It happened between Budapest and Beersheba. I don't see how she can avoid it between Beersheba and here—What's the name of the city?"

"No name yet. So you think the human will win?"

"Of course. It's the imagination too. First you are depressed because the dust covers everything, every day this yellow layer on the beds, the roofs, the skin, on the tree leaves, above the sounds and gestures. Then you give up. You ignore it, avoid it. Then you imagine it's you who planted the dust everywhere, and you begin to treat it as a part of the scene—this is the real victory. They will not merely accept nature; they will claim it. They will be convinced in no time that they invented it, created the dust, carved the canyons and cultivated the dryness. Maybe it's the only way, and we don't belong here—you because you want to be taken by nature and chained by its magic, I because I know the truth."

"Which is?"

He sighed, touched a stone gently, and for a moment I thought he would not talk any more. "Never mind. It's cheating. We control the nature outside so we deceive ourselves that we can control human nature ourselves. Rita plants a tree. If it grows she will be more convinced that she can win my love. The architect— I know what's wrong with him, but never mind. When the cement overcomes the sands, he will feel greater than life. The immigrants will believe that the human will to construct which can overcome the waste land will never again lead to destruction.

But it works, and they all need it. I am lost because this devil in the crater bought me, and I lost the will to construct. He infiltrated my veins and I lost my vanity and I lost my soul to it—with pleasure.”

“They say you are mad. They say you talk aloud in the crater, to yourself!”

“To the devil, and he answers—you can come one night. It was not Mephisto who was the strongest, it was Faust. He had the choice and could take it or leave it, and this is the moment of strength. I go through it every night. Do you like my red stone?”

“Yes, very much.”

“I’ll bring you a nice one one day, if you will stay around. It won’t be long.”

I returned to the camp. Rita was tired. We exchanged good nights and fell asleep at once. I knew I didn’t really understand Leni.

The next few weeks went by in a huge sweeping movement. The rhythm of the first day was preserved and the first few white buildings were ready. Leni moved his tent and stones further away; I watched the trees grow, and they did. Drilling for water had begun, and Rita’s café—at this stage a wooden two-room house—was ready. I moved in with her and helped her. Every evening the few small tables were arranged in front of the house, and people came for coffee and cakes.

What remained wonderful was the fact that a few steps away, always only a few steps, this giant animal was still there breathing and crawling; and a few more steps away, there was the path to the canyon—steep and narrow.

I grew accustomed to meeting Leni going down or coming up. We would walk together, not uttering a word, and I'd listen to him argue with the unseen forces, demanding like God, or asking like Faust, or bending down to pick up a stone lit by the moon.

One night, I returned late. There was no light in our room, and I went in carefully. On the doorstep I met the architect. We were both embarrassed, and our embarrassment echoed in the night, in this virgin city, and sank toward Rita's bed. He disappeared.

"Sorry," she said. "I didn't know you would be back so early."

"Never mind. I'll move to the other cottage tomorrow. Good night."

The next day we had the first serious sandstorm. We were having lunch early. The sky was whitish blue, almost colorless, the air heavy and still, like a threat. Every voice had the ring of a last word spoken, and every gesture that of a tired dying man. Laughter seemed devilish and limbs stiff and bound.

We saw it approaching. A tall, blond pillar

dancing a macabre ballet choreographed by the mad hand of the wind and guided in drunken movement, pausing for a second as if insulated, whirling with petticoats of dust, swaying and leaping toward us. We were fascinated, rooted, unable to move until someone shouted: "Fools, go in! Shut everything!"

In a second the site was emptied, the word passed to the workers, the machines, the trees: "Go in!"—and the pillar, roaring with laughter, swept through the town.

I remained outside. It was not curiosity or a display of courage. I could not move. I heard someone behind me, "You wanted to see nature defeating the city. Here it is. Watch it." I had no chance to watch; the sand covered us. Leni pulled me, told me to shut my eyes, and with him holding my hand we ran between the houses. I was dancing with the dust and gliding with the wind. It covered my hair, filled my nostrils and ears, and reddened my eyes whenever I dared to open them. We kept running until we reached Leni's tent. He pushed me inside and came after me.

"You fool, never do it again. It's not funny!"

I had tears in my eyes and he smiled. "I know," he said. "I feel the same. I want to be seduced by it, and you want it to rape you—but then what?"

And there was sudden silence. The air was as still as before, and the sky regained its bluish color. We walked about, but the city seemed dead.

We passed our fingers over surfaces, drawing lines in the thick layer of dust, upon leaves which still looked strong, walls, the tables of the Sunset Café. All the shutters were tightly hooked, and the doors were like blind eyes. The generator's pulse was beating under the sand that the storm had piled on it; and though for a second it seemed as if the town had perished, and was as ancient and dead as the stones, we knew nothing had changed, and that it was breathing regularly with red blood and green life under the yellow.

ASH

That evening the man appeared. He was vaguely silhouetted against the skies at dusk. He was moving but seemed to hover above one spot, thin, almost transparent, tall and bony like a glass skeleton or a weak tree trunk. He was shabbily dressed and, as it grew darker and he neared the Sunset Café, there was something ghostly or saintly about him.

When he came closer there were his eyes. Deep and black and dead. Something was missing there, not only the fire and excitement I was used to seeing around me, but everything else. Eyes with no expression, no sparkle, as if someone had painted them carefully with dull black to remove all trace of glee or sadness, to avoid reaction or hope or memory. Two hollow holes separated from the skull, from the man's mind, or past, or heart. He asked for water and his eyes showed no thirst; he asked for a bed and his eyes weren't tired; he asked for the name of our city and there was no curiosity in his eyes. I looked into them trying to penetrate with my warmth, trying to melt away his suspicion, but I could see only my own image reflected, and I had to turn away shivering.

"I am David. I want to live here." He sat at a table, put his small bag aside and shut his eyes, re-

laxing for a moment. There was no difference. He seemed to be blind with his eyes open, and to see us all when he shut his eyes. I told Rita to make some coffee for him and I brought it to his table.

"May I sit down?"

"Do please."

I did. "Did you walk from the main road?"

"Yes. Not too long, soft warm sand. Was delayed by the storm."

"Did you mind the storm?"

"No."

"What will you do in the city?"

"Live."

"Do you have a profession?"

"Not really. I can do anything."

"Why did you come here of all places?"

I thought he smiled, but it was a smile of pain. "Because you have no cemetery and no flowers."

Again I shivered. "Where are you from?"

"Europe."

"Europe is very big."

"It was very small then."

"Do you have a family?"

"Yes."

Silence again. He was looking at me, and I couldn't bear his look. I didn't want him to speak, and I hated his silence. I wanted to go, to stand up and say good night and leave, but I was speared by the painful smile, by his indifference. "I have to go," I said.

"Show me the city." It was an order, a tired, strong order, and we walked away.

We strolled along what would be the main street; a few houses were lit and the rest dark and empty. Here in the main square the central buildings were being constructed. We walked on, I knew he wasn't listening. We reached the generator. He put his palm against the metal and let it shake with the rhythm of the engine. I was watching his hand—long fingers, delicate hands, those of a musician.

"Do you like music?"

"Not any more."

There was a light in Leni's tent and we walked in. The two men examined each other, and for the first time I saw Leni hesitant, very serious, almost sad. He behaved as if he had known David all his life and tried to avoid him. He whispered to me: "He is a good man. Take care of him."

We sat in the yard, watching the fire. "I love burning wood and the color of flames."

"I hate it."

Every word David said to us had a determined final truth in its sound, the kind of statements that leave one in mid-air without an answer or protest. To my great surprise, Leni put out the fire and we sat there in the steely blue atmosphere, after the storm and before the night's chill, not daring to be alone and not wanting to be together.

Leni was going down to the crater tonight. We joined him as far as the path and waved good night when he disappeared behind the cliff. "He is real," David said. "It's rare."

I laughed, "Are you frightened of the depth?" Laughing, I pretended to push him, holding his arm.

"Don't ever do that."

"Why?"

"I may take advantage and jump and you will feel guilty."

Back to the city.

"This cottage is the kindergarten. We don't have children yet, but many will be coming very soon. I'll work with them."

I had the key and opened the door. There were small chairs and tables and benches, and new toys in the corner. David picked up a blond silly-looking doll. I smiled. "A funny one, but you never know what children will like. As a child, I was in love with the ugliest doll."

"No doll is ugly." He sat on the floor, the toys around him, and started playing, arranging the cubes and forming a tower, dressing the dolls and talking seriously to them. I thought for a moment we had hit a common note, and told him about the children: ". . . and we'll get a doll's house, and more toys. The architect showed me the plan for a pool for the children. They will get one meal

a day here, and we shall have at least fifty by next month. If you like children you could come and help me when you are free."

"I don't like children."

I felt anger, frustrated anger. What did he want? Why didn't he leave the blond doll? Let me lock the door and let him do the things he does like. I stood up. "I am going to sleep. You may stay. I'll leave the key for you. That is, if you don't mind staying here alone."

"I'm never alone. I will play with my sister and brother until they are sleepy, and will bring you the key later."

"I live in the cottage next to the café where we met."

"We haven't met yet."

I wanted to slam the door and found myself gently closing it, leaving David behind with his brother and sister and with sad, long fingers clutching the leg of a teddy bear.

I went to the café. The people there were having a rather vulgar conversation, laughing loudly and telling jokes. Rita was sitting in the center next to the architect, whose knee was pressed against hers. I hated myself at that moment, for she looked to me like the prostitute she was. She was red-faced, made up, giggling; her frock was cut too low and she smelled of cheap scent. She was telling them about Budapest. She had been rich and elegant then, she said. She described the car

she owned, her ball gown, a party she once threw, and she described her husband—small, ugly, pathetic, and rich. She seemed drunk.

I spat in the sand and walked to my cottage. Their laughter tried to drive David's existence from my mind. But he was there when I arrived.

"Here's your key. I hope I left it all in order."

"Don't go to the café. They are being noisy and not even funny."

"What do you think we all are?"

I told him about Rita and Leni.

"You misjudge her. She is not the type. Too obvious. It's his fault and he doesn't know it. When a woman's first love is stepped upon, ignored, taken apart, and rejected at the man's own choosing—when a woman is ready to give all and the man wants nothing—with people like Rita it is suicide, or the extreme. If she can't give herself to whom she chooses, let everybody have her. Did you ever love without being loved in return?"

"No," I said. "I never loved at all. Did you?"

"I will never love. I could never love a woman who didn't love me, and no woman could love me as she would have to meet me at first, and to understand—and what I am made of is the result of the human at its lowest. The marks on my soul are those of devilish forces, and no human being can touch me and survive."

"Would you like to sleep here?"

"Yes."

I slipped into bed. He took off his clothes and arranged his blankets in the corner. When he took off his jacket, his long white wrist was exposed, and there, screaming into the night, tearing through my stupidity, shaming me, was a number clearly tattooed: 31758—a concentration camp number. He must have been barely fourteen at that time.

“Sleep well,” he said. “Don’t mind me. Sometimes I talk in my sleep or am restless. I’ll look for a place of my own tomorrow. Thank you for being so kind.”

“Good night, David.”

“Mother,” he murmured. “Yes, son,” I thought. “Rivka, Avram, don’t go away,” he said. “We are here, brother,” I thought. “It’s cold: I want my clothes!” he cried. “I’ll warm you up,” I thought. He was sweating. “God!” he shouted. “I don’t know where God is—God who let mothers and Rivkas and Avrams die,” I thought.

He turned and moved and seemed to calm down. I didn’t sleep that night and awaited the dawn wistfully. I was talking to him for hours, to this unknown tortured ghost of a man sleeping on the floor, to this result of something beyond my imagination or comprehension. I was talking to him for hours in this new city we had all escaped to. I was talking to him from my shameful comfort, from my ignorant heart.

Sleep, David. It's I who should be awake, as I am the one who doesn't know. I don't know what real flames are, or real tears or the cold snows; I who have never walked barefoot or bareheaded. Sleep, because God will not answer you, for God is shamed by you and cannot answer your dead stare. You would ask him why was it Rivka and not yourself or Berta or Natasha or me, and He would fall and disappear as He did before Job, so don't ask for God. Yes, cry for your mother. Mothers always come. Some mother will answer your call, whether she is buried under ashes, or scattered in smoke in the air, or alive with sucking babies. A mother will answer, maybe, and your mother is here. Don't dream, David, as nobody laughs in your dream. Rita laughs in the Sunset Café, my dear; the architect laughs making love to her; Leni laughs defeating the devil in the crater; I laugh with the blond dolls— But we are alive. So wake up, and do not dream. Don't say it's cold. It's the flames you see. You have seen people burning, and they didn't shout that it was hot; they whispered to a God who never answered. What do I know, David? Why did you come here to tell, to tell us what? Isn't ignorance the giver of joy? But you come with the knowledge to kill our laughter.

Sleep, David, and wake up to join our ignorance, to join our burden of toys and water and dreams and orange blossoms. Wake up to greet

the sun and the sandstorms and the children. The children will be coming next week, and new toys, and you will frighten them, make them feel ashamed of being alive and having curly hair and being dirty and asking for help. You'll make them feel ashamed of being children, them and us, and me—you who never were one.

Tomorrow—that is, today—you can start anew. I will take you, the wisest, the oldest, by the hand; and I will give you flowers to smell, I will teach you the songs we learned in school, I will take you along my road, my path, my childhood. I swear by the cruel God you ask for that I'll make you laugh with joy. Sleep now. I know nothing, but I cannot stand the smell of death around you, and if any waters can wash it away, I'll carry them here for you . . . But sleep now, David . . .

I must have uttered the last word aloud, for he jerked and stared around. I pretended to be asleep, and he folded his blankets, put on his shirt and walked out to look for work.

That morning I asked myself for the first time: Who am I? For the first time I wanted to know and touch another entity—David—but I had to find out who I was first.

My parents were farmers, and I left the farm early. I have seen the world, but only the world *I* selected to see. I understood people, but the people *I* chose to understand. I gave myself—but

never completely, demanded things of others—but never enough to create a responsibility. I was attractive, but not beautiful, clever but not witty. I was honest, but because I thought it seemed second-rate to be dishonest, and kind because I found unkindness degrading.

I didn't want anything badly enough, therefore I could get everything I wanted. I felt neither self-pity nor conceit because I had a tremendous need for security, and I avoided both by my intelligence rather than with my heart.

I liked the melodramatic, but as it affected others. With a lively imagination I succeeded in living all the exciting, tragic, tremendous experiences in my mind, weaving stories, composing dialogues in which people did and said things larger than life—and when I came up against life in its natural size I treated it as second-rate, escaping to my imaginary world to complete the picture and thus avoid disappointments.

I could never really be alone for long, but cultivated a way of enduring solitude for short periods; otherwise I was a social, vivacious, well-adjusted creature.

I came to the new city as a test for myself, one of many, and for a short while. Only this time I was ready to give more; and I was trying not to remain on the margin but to stretch out toward the center.

This was all I knew in answer to the question.

The face that stared back at me from the mirror expressed the same things, and I had to leave it at that. Some things I never knew: How sensitive I was, how loving I could be, how cruel or kind when all the barriers were gone. I thought the new city would help me answer the questions, as there was something uninhibiting and liberating in this newly assembled group of people and things.

In David I found for the first time something that was larger than life, yet real. Sorrow that was beyond melodrama, secrecy which was stronger than the unknown, depth which seemed unfathomable, agelessness which was ineradicable, and truth which left me petrified.

He found work at the water-drilling plant. He knew nothing about machines but he supervised the workers and wrote notes, kept a record of the development of the work, and—like all of us—waited for the water to be reached.

We knew there was water there in the depths as you know that every human being has tears behind his eyelids, and if you scratch hard and deep enough you can produce them. Water meant everything to us, and though we knew it was only a question of time, we were still suspicious watching the confident geologists smiling broadly.

I found an excuse to go to the plant at lunch-time. It was the hottest hour, when vision is blurred and the mind stupefied, and walking is a

complicated process of ordering each foot to move. The workers were resting in the shade of the huge machines, and I couldn't see David. I asked for him. He went down, they said. I looked into the wide-dug entrance to the hole. There was a metal ladder adjusted to the side. He was coming up, sweating and serious and dirty. He was not surprised to see me there; I think he expected me to come.

"What were you doing down there?"

"I don't know. Looking for water or ashes, I suppose. Come, you can share my meal." They were given box lunches and he offered me his, not touching anything.

"You have to eat something."

"Why?"

"Well, one eats to survive and you must be hungry."

"I am never hungry, and why survive?"

"Don't be so serious at midday. One lives and eats and that's it, or dies."

"That's too easy, and I cannot die, just because it is too easy, and because they don't want me to join them. They think one should go on breathing and staring and sensing for all of them, and I was elected not to die."

"Were they elected to die?"

"This I have yet to discover. What are you doing tonight?"

"I thought of going down with Leni. It's full moon tonight."

"I will come too."

The full moon mounted the sky hesitantly. The few clouds even gave the impression that it was retreating from time to time, resting to gather strength and then climbing again toward an unknown summit, using the stars as landmarks.

Leni took his bag with him as it was bright enough to collect new stones, and we followed behind. Leni never looked back at us. David was behind him, almost floating, and never looked back at me. I watched their backs, feeling superfluous. They looked like men going to war, and I staggered behind to see who the enemy was and who would win. When the path reached the rock, David turned to give me his hand. It felt cold and wiry. If Leni's hand was of stone, David's was metallic. But mine was flesh and blood, and he didn't respond to it.

The flint stones shone in the moonlight like tears on the dry, rough cheek of the crater.

From the city you could see the crater, but from down below, the city was not to be seen; and how easy it was to forget it ever existed. Leni was drunk, and to judge by the smell it was rough local cognac, which nevertheless did not affect his solid steps or stature. He was talking to himself, making gestures with his hands. After walking

for a few hundred yards he paused, looked around, and lay down. He lay on his back, eyes open, mouth open, hands crossed on his chest, and we sat nearby.

David took my hand in his, counting my fingers again and again. We were waiting for something to happen. Leni was talking loudly now, addressing the unknown figures:

"You tell me I am weak because I detach myself. So what? Attachments? What for? You say I deceive myself in thinking I am free, that I imprison myself. That I am afraid of people because I wouldn't be able to cope with them. So be it! My love of nature, stones and wood you think a fake. It is not!" He was shouting. "It is true! true! true! It is true that I hate people! Why do I drink? . . . Just so . . . No, I am not a failure . . . I don't need anybody, do you hear? Nobody, not even you. . . ."

He was sweating and I looked at David. I don't think he heard Leni; he was somewhere else. I grew nervous: there was no shelter, no corners, not even here. It was all flat and we were naked in it, and there was Leni screaming and arguing desperately, and David remote and aloof, and I felt my feet being lifted off the ground and I was growing distant, having nothing to hold onto.

"Speak to me," I pleaded with David. "Please speak to me or I will go mad."

He said, "Shsh . . ." still holding my hand, and

he did not speak again. I walked toward Leni, bent down, and touched his shoulder: "Speak to *me*, Leni, not to the devil. It's me, speak to *me*." He did not see me.

I walked away from them, toward the path, back to the town. I looked back once; they were planted on the same spot, Leni on the ground and David sitting on a gray stone. I hurried up, back to the sound of the generator, back to the Sunset Café, back to Rita, away from the silence, away from these men who could not communicate. And with every step I knew and understood less, and I felt the tears on my cheeks for no reason, till I saw the first lights of our city, human and warm and simple.

One thing I learned that night, Faust and Mephisto were one person, and Job and God were one too, and Leni was Mephisto and perhaps David was God, and when he came back to the room I didn't move, though I knew he was watching me from his corner for a long time. Did he want me to move? Did he want to speak to me? To say something to another human being? I was afraid to discover and afraid to inquire, and I fell asleep knowing he was watching me all through the night.

David watched me the whole night, the way sons watch the corpses of their mothers before they are taken to be buried, and the whole night I was conscious even when I was asleep, because

I was afraid I would find I was as dead as a mother whose son watches over her all through the night. I almost felt he wanted me never to move again; but what terrified me was that during this night I felt nearer to him and a stranger to myself.

I avoided Leni for a few days, but he came to my house. He never knocked on the door, but he left a stone on the threshold every day. One night it was a green copper stone, another a white smooth marble, and in this dry desert they looked like flowers, like dewy fresh bunches of roses and lilies, and I would hold them, feel them, smell them, and put them on the floor next to the bed. Still, I avoided Leni.

David was there every night, his hands blistered and his skin tanned now, almost as dark as the tattooed number on his arm which was becoming less conspicuous—so much so that I expected it to disappear entirely one day. He did not talk at all, or very little. He disappeared some nights and slept outside, and he never touched or mentioned the stones Leni left. When I told him about them one day he said, "These are his poems, poor man, and good solid poems they are. We all have poems to leave on thresholds."

"What are yours?"

"Ashes. The wind carries them away and scatters them, before you have a chance to notice I've even left them for you."

"Do you?"

"Yes, but what substance do ashes have? Thinner than dust, more colorless than water, no smell to them, maybe no meaning. . . ."

He still talked in his sleep, that is, when he slept, which was rare, and it was the same every night: "Rivka, Avram, Mother . . ." He knew I heard the names, and he knew I would never ask questions or mention it. They were a riddle, a sacred riddle which he never posed and I never attempted to answer.

Poems should be acknowledged, and one evening I went to thank Leni. He was at home, or rather in front of his tent, and I knew he was pleased to see me, because poems should be answered or left untouched, and I came to answer.

He talked. "Sorry about the other night. I must have disgusted you. I was drunk. I have not drunk since, I promise you. I was not well."

"What happened after I left?"

"Strange you should ask. Something did happen."

"With David?"

"Yes. The devil noticed him and ran away. Not ran, he melted away. He was laughing at me and calling me names. He said I was a fake and he didn't want my soul. Not even the devil wanted it. And then he saw David, sensed his presence. Perhaps he saw his own ugliness and viciousness reflected in David's eyes, which were not more alive than his body, and he shrank back like a

punished child. I tell you, he was helpless and ashamed, and he lost his mockery and power, and was gone."

"And then?"

"I was afraid to look at David. I knew he had seen it too, and while before the silence dominated the night, now I heard voices, those of the wind among the stones, and of the dry grass of last winter. I almost heard the city above us and our hearts, and I longed to be back. We walked back, and David held my hand. I hoped Rita would come to me that evening, but she didn't. No, I haven't been drunk since, I promise you, and I haven't seen Rita, and I will never go to the ravine again unless David comes with me."

"Thank you for the stones. They are beautiful. Won't you miss them?"

"No. I told you, they are not really mine after I've collected them. If you don't like them you can throw them away. After all, stones fade like flowers do."

"You should come to the city more often. It's shaping and growing. It is not really alien to the scenery. Maybe one day you'll treat it as a part of it. We will be in the café tonight, after dark. Do come over."

Leni did come, but David was not to be seen anywhere. I was frightened, and found myself running around looking for him, in the café, the

kindergarten, the houses. I knocked on doors and searched in courtyards. My heart was beating fast and my hands were sweating.

He cannot leave, he has got to stay and live and survive it all. I dreaded the thought that he had just walked along the path to the main road and gone back to where he came from. Where did he come from? Back to where? To the smoke and blood? To the death, the gas, and tattooed numbers? To the ruins and shame? He couldn't go because he had nowhere to go to, but I feared that like a saint or devil, he might just disappear, evaporate, melt away like bad dreams or wistful prayers, and I needed him to be there: David, my conscience, my unknown past, my challenge, my God.

I walked to the water pump where numerous floodlights lit the metal and the sand, and the helmets of the night-shift workers, but David was not there.

I walked to the path leading down to the crater, but he was not to be seen. I wouldn't look up to the sky, in case I should find him there, tranquil and crazy.

It was chilly, the desert chill that infiltrates the marrow in the bones and freezes it, and like the burning sun it stupefied me. Who am I looking for? David. Who is David? A stranger. Am I looking for strangers? Where is he?

Then I found him. I didn't go near him, I just found him. He was on his knees behind one of the

dry bushes, and he was praying. No, he was not praying; he was fighting. He was having a quarrel with God. He was asking questions God couldn't answer, and he was blaming God; he was preaching to God; he was crying and praying and fighting, and there was nothing I could do there. He was speaking a language I didn't know and God was answering in a voice I couldn't hear, and dared not hear. I lay there watching him, feeling guilty. He was Jacob wrestling with the angel, or Job and his sorrow, and I knew he would win the battle; and I also knew that there was no room for me in this narrow space between David and his God, so I went away.

The lights in the café were on, but only Rita and Leni and the architect were there. I couldn't hear any words spoken and I avoided being seen and went back to my house. A stone was there in front of my door, as often before; a square marble this time, and my hands felt too stiff to pick it up, so I left it there.

I waited for David, and waiting fell asleep.

When David returned with the dawn, I woke up. He was exhausted. The kind of fatigue which results in complete indifference, when one doesn't hear or see objects around one, when it requires the greatest effort to produce a thought, or to put words together, or to react to the look of another human being.

“Who won?”

He sat next to me on the bed. “Nobody wins. The fight is the important thing. What He answers is not important, only what I ask. For years there were no answers, only questions, and for years before that there were no questions either, just acceptance and fear—and recently there are answers, and we fight, till the next time.”

“How often?”

“Four times a year. On the day Rivka was murdered—that is, in the spring, when the air is fragrant and fresh, and God is conceited as people bless Him for the beauty of nature. Then we talk about the blood of children. The second is on the day Avram was starved to death. It happens in Chanukah when we celebrate the victory of the Maccabees, when we light the candles and it rains outside. We fight about the right of little boys to eat bread and live. And in the summer, when the air is dry and the dust covers our eyebrows and enters our nostrils, when we are tired and thirsty, when Mother was gassed, I fight for the rights of mothers to live and breathe and sweat and be thirsty. And toward the end of the summer—today, that is—when Father was shot and humiliated—there were some clouds in the sky, did you notice? We quarrel about dignity, self-respect, and manhood. We talk about the death of fathers. I prove God to be a failure, a weakling, a cheat—then I regret it, and cry to be forgiven, and fight

again. I am tired. Maybe God is too. We'll both gather arguments for the next fight, and the next fight, and maybe the war will never end. Do you understand?"

"I am not sure. I try to."

"No, you don't understand. It is not death I am fighting—we don't complain about that, ever. We only fear it—but it's life we fight about, not the right not to die, but the right to live. They are two different things."

He went to his corner, undressed, and lay down. I left the room and went out. Do I understand?

All of a sudden I wanted to go home, to my village. I wanted to touch some soil, my heavy brown soil, and smell the hay and grass. For a moment I felt faint. The cruel scenery, the cold static lines of the area pierced me with icy needles, and I wanted the warm air of my village to caress me: I wanted life.

I returned to the room and woke David. "We must go away for a while."

"Where to?"

"We can go tomorrow. You can take a few days off. We will go to my village, we will smell flowers and the manure of cows, we will listen to birds and waste water and walk barefooted in the mud. I am depressed here, and you must come with me. Will you? We can come back soon, and the city will be here, waiting—but I need a change. You do, too."

"I do. We will go tomorrow."

I wanted David that night. He was talking in his sleep, saying: "I am God." He sounded crazy and I wanted him. I wanted his hands on my body and his lips on my mouth. My body spelled life and I wanted him back in the land of living things. I was afraid to, but I wanted to come near him, and take his hands and press them against my breasts. I wanted him excited and passionate, but he lay there tortured and struggling, dreaming of horrors, and I had no part to play in his dreams.

It was daylight. I felt dizzy, and as I had many times before, I imagined our city alive and complete, and in my imagination it was all castles and towers and flowers and children. In my imagination, it was round and luscious and feminine, with no streets or shops or vehicles, with running water and fountains . . .

Outside, the few tents and square cement houses mocked my dreams; the water pump pumped away my fountains, and the generator lit it all with faded neon, stale and foreign. It was still nonexistent: we could still sweep it away, undo it, destroy it and build it the way we wanted.

David was dressing now and told me to get ready. "We will go to your green village in the north."

We left the dust and yellow earth for the green grass.

GRASS

Black earth. Heavy and tough and faithful. Ploughed black earth as far as the eye can see, patched with green orchards and tired yellow maize fields. Black earth, the only earth which was ever real to me, which would yield the green if you poured water on it. The black earth which was marsh before, the black earth some of my friends died for, the same black earth some will die for in the future; the earth to smell, to touch, to make love on, to be buried in. The black earth of my valley. The sand seemed a bad dream, nothing substantial or worthy about it, cheating, permanently moving, carried with winds and storms. But this was the black earth of my valley, secure and pregnant and loving like an enormous mother.

I gave David a clod of black earth and his fingers touched it hungrily. He knew this earth was like a mother. He caressed it and tasted it—black earth has a sacred taste—and he laid it back sadly.

“Black earth is life,” I said. He nodded. “Maybe sand will be one day,” I said. He nodded. Once again he was not there.

“After the first rain this earth has the smell of life, an undefined smell, incomparable, the superior smell of life. Now it is thirsty, and expect-

ant, but after the first rain it smells of all that is good and worthy.”

He nodded again. David didn't know how black earth smelled after the first rains.

I took his hand in mine and we walked through the outskirts of the village to my house. I couldn't bear the colors. I felt faint and dizzy with the smells: hay, grass, fresh manure, jasmine . . . Jasmine, the strongest smell of all, sweet and intoxicating and penetrating. I couldn't stand the smell of jasmine. My senses were numb and I realized that in our new city there were no smells. I realized, when the jasmine's scent filled the air, that in our city nothing smelled; even burning wood or fresh bread had no smell there. It evaporated into the air, it had nothing to cling to, no corners to drift into and remain. There were no smells in our city.

“Will there ever be smells in our city? Jasmine?”

“I don't think so,” he said. “They will be lost in the space, but we shall learn to smell each other.”

“You don't like the smell of jasmine?”

“It is too much for me. I know it's natural, but it seems artificial to me, as if nature wanted to boast, to prove it could produce a smell stronger than our senses. So it gave us the jasmine.”

We walked toward the house. Our house is white, approached through beds of roses and a

few cypress trees. The doors are of heavy wood and the windows are always open. In front of the door there is a bench which is seldom used, and a fig tree. My fig tree, where my dreams were woven and illusions embroidered, where I first whispered words of young love. My fig tree was there, old, wise, and as superior as the black earth and the smells.

We went in. David had to lower his head on entering, so tall was he and so small the door, and he relaxed on the sofa. The food had a taste it had never had before. The bread smelled of wheat, and the milk held the warmth of the cows we could see through the window. The honey tasted of orange blossom, and the cheese melted in the mouth like fresh cream. The water was as cold as the mountain springs, and my sense of taste which had been neglected and dormant came to life with a tremble, eager to be of use, eager to drink in, to fill the gap created during these weeks of dust in the new city.

My family came in and I introduced them to David. My mother, my father, my brother, my sister. They shook hands and the conversation flowed easily. They wanted to know about the city. What should I tell? Which of the many shapes it took in my mind in turn was the real one? My conventional vocabulary wouldn't do. I did not know how to describe the lack of color or of smell. The land? There was no land, there was

no water, there were no plants, there were no buildings, no streets. It was not really there, was it? My father laughed.

"One would think you invented the city and that it isn't really there, the way you describe it," he said.

"Maybe you are right."

"Your daughter forgot the people. It is a city of people, not of buildings and sensations. The people who are there now, and those who will come later. And because there is nothing else, it is very real. We have no escape in the black earth, or in cement structures. We cannot indulge in the smell of jasmine or the taste of fresh honey, so we have to look at ourselves and at each other. It's a town of people."

Mother wanted me to talk about the people. This was more difficult. There weren't any people of the kind they knew about or understood. Should I tell them about Leni? They would pity him. The architect? They would dismiss him. Rita would arouse a faint smile and the kind of gesture villagers reserve for the sins of towns. Or David? Should I tell them about David? How could I talk about a sacred entity I didn't know? Only silence could convey David's personality, and silence was what I had escaped to come here. So I did not talk, and my brother discussed the water plant with David.

"Do you work?" my sister asked me.

"Not yet. I'm waiting for more children so I can open the kindergarten. The immigrants are coming next week. They are the real people of the town, and they are not there yet, so there isn't much to tell."

"Aren't you bored there, in the heat and the dryness?"

"No. Never. Because reality is not feasible, one's imagination is stirred and one's mind active. Come and see for yourself."

I didn't mean it really. I didn't want anybody to come.

I wanted the city to be mine and David's and Leni's. Everyone else belonged to the black earth. I didn't really want visitors. I didn't want to talk about the city. I feared I was giving it shape by merely talking about it and I wanted it shapeless.

"We are going out. I'll show David the farm. Don't wait for us, we'll be late."

The sun set behind the hills. The silvery leaves of the olive trees reflected the sun's last beams, and the tin roof of the cowshed looked as though it was on fire. The sun glided past the hills and the moon climbed, thin and earnest, with its shawl of weak stars behind it. We took the cart track down toward the orchard and disappeared among the orange trees, walking very, very slowly, trying to perpetuate every single step.

"You have met my family. Now tell me about yours, David." We sat on the ploughed black soil,

under the trees. "Tell me about your family. . . . I know it hurts. I understand more than you think I do. Talk to me about them."

He did not respond. I insisted: "Please talk to me about your brother and sister. You have met mine. Yours are like a wall around you. I cannot come near you. They won't let me pass because we have never met, and I am a stranger to them. They guard you jealously, so please teach me the password."

The painful smile again. "The password is *Death*," he said. "Yes, they guard me. But I'll introduce you to them. . . .

". . . Here, this is my house. A village house made of heavy logs and stone. It's a large house and smoke curls up from the chimney. Mother is baking bread. Do come in, it's cold outside. It was always cold outside. You can leave your coat in the corridor and walk straight in, into the large kitchen. That is where we spent most of the time. This is Mother. She is not old. Her hair is black and her eyes have a warm brown color. She will wipe her hands now and ask you to sit down. She will offer you a cup of hot soup and fresh bread. She will tell you to warm your hands and ask you about your family. Mother is like all other mothers. You will tell her what a good boy her son David is, and she will grin and be proud. Mother would have liked you.

"Avram will come in, my young brother Avram,

and you will smile broadly. Everybody smiles when they look at Avram, even the man who starved him smiled whenever he looked at Avram. He was a happy boy with eyes the color of honey and curly hair. He would have shown you his toys, and asked you to play with him.

"Rivka will come home next with her nose running. She suffered from the cold. When she died her nose was running . . . She would have had a ribbon in her hair, long hair, dark like her mother's, as dark as yours, or the black earth. When Rivka died she was cold and her dress was torn, but she was wearing her ribbon and they didn't cut her hair . . . You would probably stroke her hair, and she would show you her dolls, funny dolls, made of rags and buttons, and all with Hebrew names.

"You would play with the children upstairs, while Mother talked to me in the kitchen. She was a curious woman. She would ask me about you, your habits, your feelings, and I would blush and talk, and tell her you come from where the earth is black and the smell of jasmine fills the air, that you come from the place we'll all go to one day, and she would bless you.

"I hear steps. It's Father coming back from the prayer meeting. When he entered the house we all stopped talking for a second, as if in respect for his arrival. Avram would smile and run down the stairs. Rivka would straighten her ribbon and

walk down holding you by the hand. Father would be tired. He was always tired. He was tall and thin and his hair was gray. His beard was beautiful and his eyes shone when he talked. He would ask me about my studies, and ask Avram about his last lessons. He would stroke Rivka's hair and wait for you to talk. We would all sit at the table. You would tell them. . . . Go on, talk to them! Tell them about the heat, about the marshes, about the water plant. Tell them about the dolls waiting for the immigrant children. My father would ask you if they pray in the new city, and you would be silent. Tell him they don't go to the synagogue. Tell him his God will betray him one day. Tell him God moved from heaven into human hands and brains, and that's what you worship over there in the Holy Land. He would ask about fig trees, and cherubs, about olive trees. Did you ever try to describe an olive tree? They have never seen one.

"We would drink a small glass of sweet red wine, and say, *Next year in Jerusalem*, as they've been saying for generations. They have been raising a glass and wanting to be in Jerusalem—in Warsaw, in the Ukraine, raising a glass in Pinsk and in Berlin, in Bucharest and in Kishinev—without moving, without packing and going away. And when they did pack and go, they went somewhere else, and still they said, *Next year in Jerusalem*, and went up in smoke saying the same

words, not knowing that it was too late. . . . Tell them about the silvery green of the olive tree leaves and we shall drink the sweet red wine. They shall hear the knock on the door and the screams. The soldiers will come in. They push my father aside and order us out, and Rivka and Avram clutch my mother's apron. I turn white and stand by my father. And you— No, you weren't there. You were a baby walking barefoot on your black earth. Did you have a ribbon in your hair? Did you hear when they knocked on doors and pulled us out? Were you cold?"

"Stop it, David! You are unfair and bitter. It is not my fault that when my grandparents toasted *Next year in Jerusalem* they packed and came over to this valley and planted the trees we are sitting under."

"I am sorry. I didn't mean it like that. It's my own shame and guilt that I cannot live with."

"You were young. You couldn't help it."

"When I heard them knocking on the door I became an old man. That was when I lost my youth, not later. The rest I faced as an old bitter man, not as a child."

"I like your family. Thank you, David."

"Now you know them. There were others too. Friends, teachers, neighbors, they come and go, but these four are with me all the time. They are awake when I sleep; waiting for me to wake up. They watch me eating, and the bread gets

stuck in my throat. They watch me sweat, and they make me shiver with cold on the hottest day. They are jealous of whoever comes near me and they won't let me die. They want me to live for all of them, four lives, to pray all the prayers they cannot pray and to cry with the tears they cannot shed. The dead cannot pray or cry, you know."

"But they want you to laugh the laughter they cannot laugh, don't they?"

"I don't know. It never occurred to me."

"David. Touch me."

I took his hand in mine and moved it along my arm, my neck, my face. I wanted him. "Touch me, David. . . .

". . . Kiss me, David." His lips were real. Hard and warm and full of life, and he was kissing me. I thought for a moment I could see something in his eyes, but again it faded and I was staring at my own reflection.

"Close your eyes, David. I cannot look into them." He kissed me and his hands were feeling my body, and Avram and Rivka, his mother and his father seemed to retreat, watching, but distant.

We made love there. Under the orange trees. Strange, sad, beautiful love-making it was. Desperate. Trying to brush away shadows and dreams, trying to encircle ourselves in something which is strong, in circles of passion, desire and lust. It was not passionate, it was mature. His hand was more fatherly than manly; his body didn't trem-

ble as I wanted it to; there was something unreal about both of us, unearthly, almost untrue. We knew we were not alone, and when I touched his hair it was Rivka's hair for a second, and when my hand rested on his thin shoulder it was Avram's shoulder. He spoke my name many times, and it sounded as if he were whispering: "Mother, love me."

More than all, there, under the trees, there was shame. Shame around us, in us and between us. Not shame of the deed, but shame of our ability to do it. There were our bodies, reacting, responding, alive, and there was the chorus of the dead, envious, scolding, not interfering, but unable to leave us alone.

We were ready to go. David stroked my face gently. He had tears in his eyes. I never believed he could cry and he wasn't really crying. The tears gathered in his black eyes and he kissed me tenderly. He said "Thank you" to me, but I did not know what for. His tears remained in his eyes like unfulfilled desire, and we walked along the path to the vineyard, listening to the irritating screech of night birds.

"I'll show you my childhood, David. Follow me." We were in the vineyard now and I was a six-year-old girl. Thin, dark hair cut short, wearing a pair of shorts and a vest. "They told us at school that there was war in the world. They told us what war meant. It was in 1943, my first year

at school, and I wanted to go and see the war. My mother's brother had gone and he sent us his photograph. He was wearing the Jewish Brigade uniform and was feeding pigeons in a piazza in an Italian town. I loved him, and decided to go and see for myself what the war was like. I left the house and started walking down this path. Here, right here, I met some boys from the village and asked them if this was the right way to go and see the war and they laughed. I sat here, among the vines, and tried to work it all out. It meant nothing. The air was clear and all I could hear was the zooming of bees and flies, the distant lowing of cows and the healthy sound of a tractor's engine."

"I was thirteen and I was hungry."

"I went home to Mother, to ask about the war, and she had tears in her eyes. She told me I would understand one day. I thought then war was connected with the pigeons in the piazza somehow. I knew it had to do with killing people, but it meant nothing to me."

"I was thirteen then and my mother had gone. I was cold. It was snowing."

We walked back to the village. A group of youngsters was walking along the main road singing. "Here, David, this is me. The girl wearing the white blouse and blue shorts. We used to walk as they do, every night, sing songs, build a fire and listen to stories . . . but this was later.

The war was over in Europe; for us it hadn't begun yet. . . ."

"I was older too, then. Only so much older. I stopped singing, I stopped praying, I stopped talking. It was then that Europe seemed small, just after the war. Europe was defeated—victors and losers alike—and all the roads I took led nowhere. The road my family was made to take had an end, but that was during the war. The war was finished now and I was an old man who has lost everything, and the whole of Europe was one narrow treacherous road which led nowhere. Confusion, hunger, fatigue."

"I was eleven, a serious child, a good pupil. I helped on the farm and I started understanding things. I knew we were going to have a war, right here, in the vineyards and the orange groves, and I was worried. . . ."

"I was an old man. I arrived in France, from camp to camp, then Italy, and by boat to Greece. I didn't care any more. Before, I wanted to live. I fought not to die. Then, I didn't care. I didn't have the energy to fight to live as well. So I drifted along. . . ."

"Here is the village hall. I was thirteen. The State was declared. Mother woke me up early in the morning. It was two or three in the morning. I put on a pair of slacks over my pajamas and came here. The whole village was gathered here; even the houses seemed to move toward the

center. Someone played the accordion and they danced the *hora*. We, the children, were standing watching when someone shouted: 'The children! Let *them* dance!' We were pulled in, formed a circle, and we were dancing. Mother was crying. I was thirteen and I understood. It meant war. I didn't know until then that these towns, these hills and lakes and shores were not really ours, that they were promised but never given, dreamed about but never obtained, and when the State was proclaimed, they told me it meant war, but that night I was dancing the *hora*. I was perspiring and red-cheeked and my feet were moving automatically with the rhythm. The village was dancing, and in the morning the men left for the war. Where were you?"

"I was tired. I was in Paris, or in Rome, or in Athens. I was alone and it didn't matter where. I was alive in spite of myself. Life after the war was a duty and a burden to me, not a privilege. I didn't want to go anywhere, to believe in anything, or to communicate with anybody. I woke up every morning in those big cities to hear my father's voice telling me I had to last the day, and the next one, and the next. That night I was alone in a small room. I heard about the State, but it did not mean much then. Israel for me was the Holy Land, the Promised Land—but I didn't believe anything was holy any more. I didn't believe any promises were kept any more. I thought

there were no men left and no women or children to build a holy land. I saw them turn into ashes and I thought they were the last ones. I saw too many graves to believe that grass would grow again, ever, anywhere. I saw all the children of the world killed, and I did not believe new ones would be born. That night I was not dancing the *hora*, and I didn't believe thirteen-year-old girls were dancing the *hora* in villages anywhere."

"David. Why didn't you immigrate earlier?"

"I have asked myself the question many times. I was afraid. I knew this country wanted people who would come to give. I had nothing to give. I was consumed. For me the war was never over. I was no good as a soldier, or a farmer, or a worker. I had to find myself first, not to find something which was there, in me. I had to forget myself, and create a new personality, at least a new shell. I had to invent myself, be reborn, learn to face people, learn to trust, or as a substitute—not to expect anything and not to need to trust. I was a sick old man and I had to wait and learn to live again before I could give anything of myself."

"Here, on this hill, in the large white building, I was born. It is the regional hospital."

"You were born here. It was before they knocked on our door. It was before everything, as far back as the time of the prophets. . . . I was a child then, a real child. Rivka was a baby. I was small and handsome. I had long side-curls—it was

before they shaved my head—and wore a black cap all the time. I prayed and studied the Bible. I believed in it, I believed in my rabbi and in my God. I was beaten with a ruler whenever I forgot a word of the lesson, which was seldom for I loved to learn. I loved the stories the rabbi told us. I was not interested in anything else. We lived in a village, but I did not know the names of trees or plants. I did not notice beauty other than the beauty of the Psalms, and the only sound my ears enjoyed was the sound of prayer. That was when you were born.”

“On the hill opposite the hospital is the cemetery. My mother’s brother never came back from the war. For a time I thought he was feeding the pigeons in the piazza in the small Italian town, and then his corpse was brought here for burial. On this hill, the green one.”

“It makes no difference. Green hills or black ovens. No difference at all . . . What is this building, the white one with the columns?”

“The synagogue. Would you like to go in?”

“No. Have you ever been in?”

“Never.”

“I thought so. I shall never enter a synagogue. The desert suits me all right. If He exists, He is there as well, and if He is everywhere, He saw the children being thrown into the fire, and if He did and remained silent and didn’t push the pillars

of the earth to shake it all, He doesn't exist. So this white house of His is not of much use."

"Yet you came here. And you came to the new city to live. Why?"

"People I met. They told me it was different. They practically dragged me, and made me come and try it. I am going to. I thought of the new city as something unspoiled, without the smells of human deceit, without the sounds of disappointment and disillusionment, without the shape of anything familiar. All that is familiar to me belongs to the war. Hunger is familiar. Snow and cold are familiar. Religion is familiar. I needed a new existence, and as I existed through all, the one place for me was the nonexistent town, our new city. No name. No shape. No color. No smell. Do you understand?"

"I understand, David."

"It will not last long, this phase."

"Will you leave then? Where will you go?"

"I don't know. I shall try and acquire a new shape with the city. Maybe it is impossible. Maybe I'll wander away, on and on, between the ashes, never to live fully and never to die."

"You talk as if you carry the cross for humanity."

"Those are big words. Nothing I do or decline to do affects humanity. I don't pretend to, either. I carry the cross for myself, for Avram and Rivka, and it is hopeless. The cross is heavy and large,

but humanity has developed a magic way of ignoring crosses. Thousands of years ago they were frightened. They felt guilty and created gods and saints to bear crosses and suffer for them. Then they killed in the name of crosses. And then they forgot them. There is no need to repent, to confess or to regret. The cross-bearers help nobody but themselves. People don't see them.

"Do you see the crosses other people bear?"

"At times. Once I saw an old man. His eyes reflected all the suffering humanity gathered throughout the ages. He too was a defeated man, with pride and dignity. I thought he was one of those and I approached him. 'It is heavy,' I said. 'Is it worth it?' I asked him. He laughed in my face. He did not understand me. I was wrong. Or maybe they don't know, maybe Jesus never knew, either."

We were back in front of the house now. Mother had left a light in the corridor. I stroked the old trunk of the fig tree. So did David. Our hands touched. "Have we met?" I asked.

"No," he said. But there was no pain in his smile. "We should go back to the city tomorrow. I miss it," he said.

"So do I. We will go tomorrow if you want to. I know it better now. I know what it will never offer, but I miss the silence."

He occupied a bed next to mine in the living room. He fell asleep immediately and I watched

the moon parading from one window, across the sky and the roof, to the other window, resting among the branches of my fig tree and descending toward the hills which offered it the warmth of a woman's breast. Toward dawn David was talking in his sleep again, more confused, more restless than before. I was worried.

It was Mother, Avram, Rivka, Father as before, but something happened. To the names another one was added—my name—Yardena. He was saying my name again and again: Yardena— He was whispering: Yardena— Shouting: Yardena— Did he imagine me burning? Did he see me tortured, hungry, cold? Did he feel ashamed for me too, because I wasn't there? Did he add me to the dead, when I thought I was adding him to the living?

He pronounced my name slowly. Emphasizing every syllable. Yar-de-na—as if he heard the Yarden River rolling and roaring. I sat on the edge of his bed and touched his forehead. It was burning. He woke up. He didn't recognize me at first and jerked away.

"It's me. Yardena."

He repeated my name as if he had heard it somewhere, in a distant past: "Yardena?"

"Yes. You are in my house. I woke you up. You seemed to be suffering in your sleep."

He smiled. He was back with me now. "I am sorry. Do you think I'll ever stop dreaming?"

It was the first time he had asked me something, and I could not answer. I lied. "Yes. I think one day you will stop dreaming those dreams."

We watched the sunrise. The farm animals woke up and Father was preparing to go out to milk the cows.

"David. You said my name in your sleep. Did you dream about me?"

There was terror in his eyes now. "No, it is a mistake. It must have been. No, I didn't dream about you, of course not. You are alive, and warm, and here, and my dreams have to do with the dead, the cold and the other world. No," he said loudly, as if to convince himself.

He dressed and walked out with my father, and I prepared for the journey back. The jasmine flowers winked at me with pure whiteness and I breathed in the smell of the orange blossoms. I knew that for a long, long time now I should see only the yellow sand, and breathe only the dust. I stepped with bare feet on to the cool dewy grass, trying to take its touch with me.

PART 2

SEEDS

When I first came to the new city, it was with the nostalgia one feels for the unknown. This time, it was with nostalgic feelings for the known and loved.

During the journey we didn't talk. David pretended he was asleep and I was grateful for his silence.

It was a nervous day for the city. People were restless, angry, easily irritated. It all seemed worthless and futile. Suddenly there was not enough room; no room for our nerves, no outlet for our irritability, and we all sought someone weaker to scold or to blame. There was too much unspent energy, too many unspoken words, too much accumulated emotion, and there were no stones to kick, no trees to uproot, no women to hug and no children to shout at. Whoever could stayed indoors, to be alone was the only cure. David understood and left me alone in the house. If he had stayed, I would have hurt him. It was not a day for kindness, and I could not have stood his tranquil, distant expression. I wanted to be treated badly, so that I could answer back. Leni was not to be seen. I was angry with him for not being there and angry with Rita because she was. Clumsy and confused, I was angry with the archi-

fect for being busy and angry with the wind for being late. Was I fighting love?

I lay on the floor daydreaming. What did I want? What had I got? What did it all mean? We could build a new town, and plant trees, but would the people in it be any better? And who was to say what "better" meant? Rita is a whore, I thought, and Leni is proud. Is pride a sin? With David, laughter seemed like a sin. The sky was white through the window, filthy, colorless white. Perhaps love is a sin—but why was everything so silent? Maybe the city had died. Perhaps everyone is dead and I am left alone. Maybe if I leave the house I shall step on corpses and disfigured faces. If they are alive why don't they talk, shout, scream, or sing? I didn't dare lift my head or move. It was a difficult day and when it grew darker even the shadows of our nerves were elongated, and then hid but did not disappear when David came back.

"Let's go to sleep now," I begged.

"Are you afraid of something?"

"Yes, distance."

I undressed, and so did he. We pushed the narrow bed against the wall and I waited near the window.

"You sleep near the wall," he said.

"No, I prefer the other side."

"Please. I cannot sleep near the wall."

I didn't accept it really, but I obeyed. We lay

there, in the dark silence, buried beneath it. I could hear our hearts beating in time to the throb of the water pump, but the man next to me was miles away.

"Come closer to me, David. I cannot be alone tonight."

"And tomorrow? And the day after? I warned you. We shall always be apart, you have to learn to be alone with me, or, if you'd rather, to be alone without me. . . ."

"Tell me a story."

"You wouldn't like the only stories I know."

"Tell me a funny story. Make me laugh!"

He sighed. I caressed his body. I could feel his ribs and the bones under the stretched skin. I thought I could feel tattooed numbers, all over.

"Say something silly to me, say anything, but talk to me!"

"What are you afraid of, Yardena?"

He didn't respond to my touch. I thought it almost irritated him, as if I were pressing my fingers against open wounds. I wanted to swear, instead I started crying.

He paid no attention to my tears. His hand did not stroke my hair nor did he hug me warmly. But he was there, and all of a sudden, I knew I had no right to cry, no right to swear, and no right to laugh.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cry."

"Sleep now. You need sleep. People are coming

tomorrow, the immigrants. You will have to work hard tomorrow. Good night."

He fell asleep immediately. I couldn't sleep. I wanted to go for a walk, and very quietly and carefully I made an attempt to slide out of bed. His hand gripped my arm, and wouldn't let go of it; yet he was still asleep. I had to lie there the whole night, alone, trapped, afraid to move, unable to escape and unable to sleep. Will it be like this every night, I wondered.

At dawn I heard the trucks and buses arriving with their human cargo to populate our empty city.

They kissed the soil, and knelt to pray. They didn't laugh, or run around or explore. They were tired. We had no common language, and they were frightened. Our own group seemed small and insignificant, standing aside, watching the old and the young, with their few bundles of clothes and rugs, knowing it was their day, their city, and their future. We were there to guide; they were there to live. We had sown the seeds; they would sweat and toil and cultivate the plants. The gap between the two groups seemed unbridgeable.

Rita touched my hand. "I am also an immigrant, yet I feel as if I had been born here. Do you think they'll ever feel the same?"

"We should pray with them," I said irrelevantly.

David was praying with them. Kneeling between a Persian woman, wearing a mauve velvet dress and gold earrings, and a bearded old Iraqi. The architect waited impatiently. He was supposed to talk to them and make them feel welcome. He had expected a younger group, more enthusiastic and idealistic. He couldn't hide his disappointment. I looked at the children. Even they seemed tired and exhausted. They didn't show the curiosity and liveliness I had expected. They watched the scene slowly, their staring eyes wandering from house to house; to the pump, to the crater, and back to the road they had come by. They didn't look like children who would want to play with funny dolls.

The architect started speaking. An interpreter translated every sentence into Persian and Arabic.

"Brothers," he said. "After generations of slavery, you've reached this place of freedom, homeland and independence.

"It is not going to be easy, but we shall all work together. We will find water, our children will go to school, the trees will grow, you will work in the factory and be happy.

"For the time being you will live in temporary houses and gradually you will move to newly built stone houses. This is our home, and we shall make it a happy one."

He finished. He was sweating badly, and he was glad it was over. No one spoke. They seemed to

think they needed permission to talk or ask questions. They didn't move. We were all at a loss for a second. What now? How can we tell what this moment means to them? Homeland, Freedom . . . maybe these words meant nothing to these people, words we took for granted. David stood up. He spoke gently and warmly. He told them about the heat and the winds, about the border, the lack of water, the crater and the hard work. He spoke about the harshness of the land. The interpreter's voice trembled. David told them how he had come a few weeks ago and how he felt now. He said a short prayer and told them to pick up their belongings. At last they were shown to their houses. David took my hand in his. "Shall we go home too?" he said. I followed him gratefully.

At home David tried to explain the immigrants to me. It wasn't that I felt superior, only that they were not real enough for me. Since I had met David reality was often confused and devoid of meaning. Things which had been real and meaningful, which touched me or affected me, now were transferred to another self, and either forgotten or unimportant.

Thus, after his long explanation of their backgrounds, hopes, and beliefs, I asked him, "Do you love me?" Again, he stared at me fixedly, with pity, and stroked my hair as if I were a hopeless patient; and then he left the room. The truth was that I was afraid, afraid of the unknown. By

then the known was mingled with my dreams and hallucinations, and I was afraid of the children.

If I could have helped it, I wouldn't have left the house to walk through the crowded city toward the kindergarten. But I had to, and I found myself facing the thirty children, and with the help of an interpreter, trying to get to know them.

They made it easy for me. They did not understand what I said, but they liked the toys and the games. After a couple of days we seemed to settle down to a happy routine, full of laughter and songs. The children's delightful way of pronouncing my name and calling it out impatiently . . . Yar-de-na . . . almost blotted out the whispering groan of David, saying Yardena in his dreams.

One morning, for no obvious reason, things changed again.

I was combing Shoshana's hair. Shoshana was my favorite. She was five, and bright. Her hair was long and dark, and her eyes burningly black. Her mother was very ill so I spent more time with her than with the others. Her frankness was disarming and embarrassing at times, but her affection for me was genuine and I didn't find it difficult to reciprocate. I was combing her hair one morning when she asked for a handkerchief. Her nose was running.

"It's always running," she apologized.

I gave her mine, and continued to comb her hair.

She said something to me.

"No, Rivka." I answered. She laughed.

"I am Shoshana, not Rivka."

"Of course." I smiled.

"Who is Rivka?"

"David's sister." They all knew David because he came to fetch me after work.

"Is Rivka a girl or a lady?"

"A girl, like you."

"Why isn't she here then?"

"She is here."

"Where?"

"I mean, she's dead."

Shoshana turned sharply toward me, and the comb fell to the floor. Some of the boys were quarreling in the background and my head felt heavy and swaying. The face of Shoshana was a blurred image now and I needed fresh air. What terrified me was that she did understand. She put her little hand in mine.

"She is dead, Rivka, so you shouldn't think about her, or do you still love her?"

"I hate her." I regretted having said it, too late.

"How can you hate a little girl?"

"How can a little girl die?"

I couldn't help myself. I knew I shouldn't talk like this to Shoshana, age five. So I left the room, left her staring at me calm and understanding, and told the children to go home. I told them I

didn't feel well, and it was late anyway. I walked toward Leni's house.

I took off my shoes because they felt heavy. And the sand was snow. The hotter it was the colder it felt—and the cold touch of the blazing sand penetrated from my feet to my head like long needles, unbearable and painful. The small trees we planted looked large and green and I was running on the snow in the wood. Bearded men and kind women said *shalom* to me and I could hear David's voice introducing me to his parents. I reached Leni's hut and stormed into its empty coolness. I lay on the cement floor which felt hot after the snow-covered path and held my head trying in vain to stop its swaying movement, trying to focus, trying to think.

I talked to myself for hours; I must have, because it was dark when Leni returned to find me. I tried to start from the beginning— You were born in Ron-Am, twenty-three years ago. There, in the hospital on the hill. Your father is a farmer, and your sister is alive and happy. You are alive, I repeated, alive! You like to make love and warm blood flows in your veins, and the hair you combed was Shoshana's, the little girl you love and she is alive too— *He told me they never cut Rivka's hair, I wonder why? Was it too soft for mattresses?*— But it was Shoshana's hair, and you left the boys quarreling. The boys? Not Avram—

No, it was not snow, you are in the new city, where the trees are small and there is no smoke in the chimneys, no smoke—no snow— It is dust—touch it, dust, not ashes, nor grass, just the pure, new, irritating dust—breathe it, take it in, Yardená . . . I tried to concentrate on details which might bring me back to reality, my true reality . . . I remembered my army days. Holding a hand grenade which was always real enough to make me shiver. Now it seemed as if I could let go of it and it would explode, leaving me as I am. As alive or as dead as I am, it didn't matter— Describe your room, I ordered myself. Your room is the village. It has a narrow bed and a table. A straw mat on the floor and a book shelf— My head was clearing now.

I dared to open my eyes at last and saw Leni's bare feet. I raised my head with an effort to his hairy legs—shorts—his hands in his lap still holding the bag full of stones—to his broad chest. To see his face I had to move or get up and it seemed too much effort for the moment, so I lowered my head and waited for him to say something.

My eyes were now back on his feet, large and tanned and dusty. I counted his toes and, satisfied none were missing, shut my eyes again. I knew where I was now, all was clear and sharp and my head felt lighter. I regretted having involved Shoshana in something which was beyond her, be-

yond me, and wondered where David was. Was he looking for me? Did he ever look for me?

I knew I ought to say something to Leni to explain my strange position, but this too was too much effort, so I lay on the floor not wanting to move, content and relaxed, counting Leni's toes and trusting him to remain silent for as long as I did. The afternoon left a thin layer of uncertainty and despair, but with the dark evening things acquired their normal shape again, and normalcy meant what it always did.

Leni's foot moved. He stood up and fetched an oil lamp. Its pale shivering light danced on the cement. It disturbed me, and I decided to rise and sit or stand. Leni's face was tired and serious. More serious than ever before, almost worried.

I smiled to him. "Anything wrong, Leni?"

"I should be asking you. But I know the answer. Here, have a seat." He pointed to one of the square stones and I sat on it as if awaiting a sermon.

"You must stop it, Yardená. You still can. And if you don't want to talk, say so now, but if you do—let's be frank." Stop what? My head felt light and I was willing to laugh, I was almost amused to see how anxious Leni seemed.

"Look here, I am an old man, and I have made too many mistakes to try and preach, but I can tell you one thing. The minute you become a

burden to a man, and impose yourself on him, the minute you cannot communicate with the man you love, the game is up, and you've got to be strong enough to go, or make him go."

"Are you trying to tell me that David doesn't love me?"

"No. That is not the point. He loves you as much as he can, and ever will. But he cannot fall in love with you. His world is made up of unreal memories or illusions—abstract and changing. Nothing else is real. You have to choose. Either you belong to his painful distorted memory, unstable and undemanding, or you become an unreal object, like the stones are for me, or like the furniture and the house are for him."

"Where does he belong in his own world?"

"His identity doesn't mean a thing to him. The David of the past came to life in the crater when you left us the other night. There is his reality—his body and present being, almost a superfluous object if he dared to admit it."

"I love him, Leni."

"I know you do. But it is hopeless. You should know by now that he will not change. You know what is happening to you, and you've got to stop it. Masochism is a part of your love, and the rest is a habit you are forming. You love him as you want him to be, not as he is. How can you love something you don't know? The minute you do

get to know him—and you are allowed a glimpse already—it means destruction.”

Leni was putting his stones in order; new ones not yet covered with dust. He was doing it automatically, without enthusiasm or thought.

“And you and your stones. How long will they last?”

“Not long. One day I’ll scatter them back in the desert. It’s only a pastime. But I am open to other influences. I am opening up while you are closing, hopelessly.”

The stones were now arranged in line, clean and bright like children ready to be put to bed.

“Come to Rita’s for coffee.”

“No. It’s crowded recently. The city is crowded. They are nice people, and will make the city worthy and alive, but there are too many of them, and more to come. I have moved twice, and there are no outskirts left but the crater. I feel trapped so I keep indoors, but I know I cheat myself, and one day I shall have to face it all, people, cities, Rita and you.”

“Why me?”

“I love you, Yardena. Don’t misunderstand it. I love all that you represent, and I came to Israel to find exactly this. Seeing it change is very painful. I want you too, but I can control this. My love is like Shoshana’s. I am jealous of David, because he is privileged to see you wake up in the morning, and watch your hands as you make the

bed, and smell your skin after a hot shower. But I hate David for not knowing how lucky he is, for not knowing you, for that matter. Had he known you he would have done all in his power to make you happy."

"You talk too much. I am sick of people who address me as if I were the result of some dreadful misunderstanding. I am happy, I am in love. I live a regular life. I do my work, and my life, like yours or anybody else's, has its ups and downs."

Leni got up. "Nice little speech," he said. He moved slowly toward me and his hands were stretched forward.

"Nice little speech. You are a kind, obedient little woman—or pretending to be one. Do you know what you lack?" He grabbed me by the arm. He was serious now and impatient with my grin. "You have no passion. You are not treated passionately, and you don't resent it. And this is new." His hands were around me and I felt uncomfortable as he continued. "When I met you, you had passion in your eyes, in the way you touched my stones, in your voice and in your body. But now you walk tiptoe instead of striding." Leni's hand was stroking my hair and I shivered for a second.

"You're shivering. You're afraid of passion. You are afraid of giving, and giving without passion is charity, cold charity, and trying to help the

children, or the city, or David without passion, without lust, without kicking and pulling and touching— It's all false and dangerous."

He kissed me. I didn't respond. I didn't push him away either. I was half listening, but I was thinking of other things. I didn't mind Leni's hands, they didn't repel me. I wasn't really there so it didn't matter.

"Kiss me, Yardena, kiss me hard—or push me away, fight me, say I am a bastard, or say you love me. But react!"

He unbuttoned my blouse and touched my breast. He hurt me. His hand was rough, and his touch strong and demanding. I felt nothing. I wondered why David wasn't looking for me.

"Are you like this with him? Is that what it's all about? Or maybe he doesn't touch you." I had to smile. "Are you laughing? Laugh if you must, loud, cruel and happy—but laugh, don't smile."

His hands covered my body. He breathed heavily and looked beautiful there in the dark, but he pushed me down and was heavy on top of me.

"Push me away. Hit me, spit on me! I'll take you, Yardena. I love you, Yardena. Don't you feel anything?"

"No, Leni."

He got up. I remained on the floor and shut my eyes.

"I won't say I am sorry. I am sorry for *you*. I

hate to think I was right but I've never raped anybody yet. So get up and button your blouse, and go back to where you think you belong, and let others' hands touch you, and maybe you will come back to me one day."

I had nothing to say to Leni, so I didn't answer. I walked into the city and through its main street. There was light in every house. And in every house was a family. They were eating now, and I could see women carrying steaming pots from kitchens, and children in pajamas drinking milk.

There was light in the other houses but our house was sunk in darkness. I never knew whether David was at home, since he never bothered to put the lights on. I sat on the bench on the small porch and took off my shoes. I leaned back, trying to absorb every breath of the light breeze. I had no desire to go in. I didn't want to put on the light, to make supper, to undress, to put off the light. All these actions seemed superfluous, unreal and unnecessary. I could have sat there all night, and the following day, and many days. It wasn't apathy. My mind was active and my brain at work, only my thoughts had to do with another world; and the more I indulged in that world, the more passive my attitude was toward the real one.

I was quite content there on the porch, not a muscle moving, not a nerve tense, floating as if drugged, detached and lonely, in this very narrow and treacherous territory between the daydream

and the hallucination. I sensed the emptiness of the house, or rather—I didn't sense David's presence and was sure he wasn't there. Where was he? Did it matter really?

What Leni had tried to tell me was that I was losing my balance, perhaps going mad. I smiled. Just because borders disappeared, he called one mad. Who was Leni anyway? Is collecting stones normal? We both identified ourselves with something we believed to be greater than us. I knew nothing about Leni, about Rita, or about David. How could I touch them? If I were a stone, or a poem, or an abstract idea I could have floated into their minds and hearts; I could have got nearer to them. But I was Yardena, a teacher, whose hair was long, whose best dress was a blue and white checked one, and whose eyes betrayed puzzlement and expectation; all very real and very insignificant to these people. I heard a rustle, as if a light figure were flying toward me on the breeze. It wasn't David. I knew his footsteps—the hesitant, slow motion of his sandaled feet—I had a terrifying presentiment . . . They were coming for me—his family. At last they have left him, and are coming to me. I came too near to Rivka today. I could see them clearly now, and for the first time David was not with them.

They were pitiful, but I couldn't pity them. They were in black, but I couldn't mourn for them. They needed help, but I couldn't pray for

them. They were Jewish and I was myself, and I didn't know what it meant. It meant that I loved David, but did this mean I had to share his ghosts? Why didn't they come to the dry marshes? Why did they wait? Had they died for me? Why me? If only they'd dress differently. They looked as if they were sorry for me. They advanced, kind and light, with shaking fingers held out to me. I hated them then. I hated them as Leni had hated me.

"Grab me, if you want to," I whispered, "or go away. Pull me, strong and confident, or leave me alone. Don't hint, but cry or scream." I hated their uncertainty, their hesitation. I wanted them to be a challenge—not a possibility.

I heard David's footsteps, and the ghosts faded away. I wasn't inventing the ghosts, nor were they products of my distorted imagination. I was quite sane when they appeared, aware of myself and my real surroundings; neither were they symbols of my Jewish consciousness. They were just there, fading in and out of the scene, dumb but expressive, and I accepted them as inevitable, unwelcome guests.

David knew I had seen them and avoided the subject. Whenever I mentioned it, he said—"I warned you, didn't I?" and withdrew into his corner, the corner where he first put his mattress. It was still his retreat, although we shared a bed. Whenever he was there I knew I was excluded

from his present, and had to behave as if there was a heavy thick metallic screen between us. That evening, there was something unpleasantly cheerful about his behavior. As if he knew something I was trying to hide.

"Is my supper ready?"

"No."

"Let's go in and explore the kitchen." He gave me his hand and I followed reluctantly. The thought of food sickened me. "Cheer up. I thought you wanted to see me smiling, so when I do, you cannot become gloomy. Anything the matter?"

He was cutting the brown bread now and was smiling. I looked for an excuse to leave the kitchen and go to bed, to cover myself with a white sheet, relax and sleep.

"Yardena, I went to see Leni. He told me what happened earlier this evening."

"Is that why you are smiling? Did it amuse you?"

"No, I knew it was bound to happen. Leni has wanted you all along, he loves you in a good healthy way. I expected it."

"Did he tell you all the things he told me?"

"Yes, Leni cannot hide anything from me—you cannot either—without reproaching himself and feeling guilty afterwards. But this is not new. I told you the same thing many times."

"You never told me you did not love me."

There was silence. I never dreamt I could say that sentence to him.

"I never told you I loved you, either. I told you to go away. I told you I was not good enough for you. I told you I was drained and dry of emotion."

"You never said you didn't want me."

"I never told you I did want you. I took you, sometimes because I had the physical need to do it, at times because you wanted it, always because it gave you the illusion of being near to me."

"David. Why are you here? Why do you wake up with me, and go to sleep with me, and talk to me?"

"It is the key question, isn't it? I am trying, Yardena. I am trying to learn to share and live with another human being. I am trying to learn to love. I am very fond of you. It means a lot to me—this house, this kitchen, your face, your eyes—everything about you. I didn't want to lose it, I want to be worthy of it, it will all end either as a wonderful paradise or with utter destruction."

"Are you experimenting, while I live?"

"Call it that, if you want to be harsh. I am trying very hard, and nobody could have helped me more than you do."

"Let's go to sleep. I am exhausted."

"Would you like to go to Leni's, Yardena? Leni is a part of me, a missing part. I won't be offended.

I will miss you, but he will make you feel like a woman."

"Let's go to sleep, David. Don't ever talk to me about Leni. I don't think I could face him after today."

David was eagerly eating bread. No other food satisfied him as much as thickly cut brown bread.

I washed and waited for him in bed. His thin tanned body occupied a third of the narrow bed, and he lay on his back with his eyes so widely open that I thought at times he could not lower his eyelids. His hands were resting along his thighs, not touching mine, and if he had risen and floated in mid-air, between the bed and the ceiling, I wouldn't have been surprised.

"Good night, Yardená."

"David. When I combed Shoshana's hair today I thought it was Rivka. Is she like Shoshana?"

"Her hair is. Yes. You shouldn't think of Rivka."

"Shoshana's nose is always running too."

He turned to look at me. "Yardená, Leni was right, you should go to him. I haven't the guts to be firm and insist you leave because I am selfish, but today it was Rivka. Tomorrow it will be Avram, or my mother. You'll go to pieces. I see them and survive because they depend on me and need me alive. But you? You don't owe them anything, not a prayer or a tear or your time or thought. You owe Shoshana a lot, and Rivka

nothing. For me, it's the same debt, the past and the future are inseparable. It is too late for philosophy. Do you love me?" he asked.

"But— How strange it sounds when you ask."

"Tell me."

"I love you, David. I love you very much."

He made love to me. And to my horror I shut my eyes and imagined Leni making love to me. I imagined Leni's muscles against mine, and Leni's blue eyes smiling kindly. I imagined Leni's strong legs and feet pressing my own, and I hated myself for being with Leni.

But when it was over, it was David again, calm and tired, kissing me lightly and saying good night, turning on his side—his back to me—and falling asleep almost immediately.

I tried to listen to the wind—always a soothing sound; but the air was still now and I could hear David's breathing, an occasional dog's bark, and my own confused mind ticking in a mad rhythm, trying to catch its tail—leading nowhere—only further from the understood and the simple, and deeper into an abyss of mysterious elements which were all beyond me.

WATER

By describing one day of our life together, I shall describe them all. We followed a routine, at least in our actions and behavior.

David's work obliged him to be at the plant at sunrise, which meant we had to get up at dawn. Dawn in the new city had a special quality. The desert woke up with a yawn, but unlike other cities, our city awoke every morning as if it had been asleep not for a night, or a week, but since God created the world; it was as if it awoke for the first time.

We opened the windows to see the city lazily stretch, as if it couldn't decide whether to fold itself up again and sleep for further generations—or burst with a sudden movement into life and action.

David never spoke in the morning. He dressed, put on his blue overalls and sandals, shaved and washed, and looked through the window as if trying to straighten out the crumpled sand.

There wasn't much breakfast to be got as he refused to eat any. I was used to large farm breakfasts, and when I cooked one that first morning after he stayed overnight, he looked at it as if sorry to see so much food on our table, and asked for bread and coffee only. "No butter, no jam—

they are decorations," he said. He cared for essentials only.

Since that time I had bread and coffee too, and if after he'd gone I scrambled eggs for myself, it was always with a feeling of cheating and guilt. Eventually I too lost the taste for the decorations and gave up.

After David left the house there was an hour before I had to go, and I enjoyed doing the things I dared not do in his presence. I brushed my hair, taking a long time, and I looked at myself in the mirror. I polished my nails, turned the radio to frivolous light morning music, and occasionally tried on a good dress which I had no chance of wearing in the new city.

My day started at eight, when the city was fully alive, and the sun blazed threateningly. I tied my hair in a knot, wore a skirt and blouse, put on sandals, and walked along the main street to the kindergarten where most of the children were already waiting.

I describe these seemingly unimportant things because the contrast between this routine and the emotional turmoils may have had something to do with my inability to cope with both.

During working hours I had no time to think and I devoted myself to the children. Toward lunch time I grew nervous waiting for David, and it was usually Shoshana who noticed him first and came to tell me he was there.

The children naturally thought we were married and treated him with curiosity and respect. The first few times it was difficult. He never felt at ease with them and was reluctant to answer their innocent questions.

"Why have you got numbers on your arm?"

"Oh, these. Just because in Germany they marked the Jews with numbers because they couldn't remember so many names."

"Why don't you take them off, now that we know your name?"

"I tried. It doesn't come off."

"Do you like children?"

"Of course, I do."

"Then you should have some. Yardena loves children." Every day at lunch time, hurrying as the sun was at its zenith and the heat almost unendurable, we walked back to the house. We never held hands. He never touched my arm, and I didn't dare hold his. We had to cross the main street and say *shalom* to other people escaping to the coolness of their houses; and we had to pass Rita's café where I bought a bottle of milk every day while he waited outside for me. Reaching home, David lay on the bed with a book and I went to the kitchen to get the food ready. We didn't have lunch, but a glass of milk and buttered bread, some fruit maybe, and during the meal we exchanged only a few relevant and necessary sentences.

David slept in the afternoon while I studied and took care of the washing and cleaning and at four he went back to the plant. Some afternoons I went to Rita's or to the architect's office. At times I had to see parents and twice a week I taught Hebrew to adults.

At sunset David would come home. His long shadow dimmed the few steps, stopped for a brief moment on the porch, and like the last beams of sunlight, long and quiet and sliding, he came in.

The evening was quietly ours. We talked, or went for a walk. He agreed to a proper dinner and I enjoyed cooking it, and every evening before going to sleep David left the house for a walk on his own. Where did he go? Did he talk to people? Did he walk in the town or out toward the crater? I never knew or asked. At times he was gone for moments only, and occasionally for an hour or two.

During this time I always felt tense and unhappy. I washed the dishes and sat on the porch. Not really waiting for him, yet jerking to the sound of distant footsteps. Not really thinking—yet always preoccupied with the same problems.

When he came back, he'd touch my shoulder as if suggesting we should go in; then he'd take a long cold shower and join me in bed. Ask him about his feelings, try and tell him about mine? Every night I regretted having started, and felt ashamed of my curiosity. Some nights we made

love. Every night he woke up a few times. Every night he had the same dreams and some nights I had his dreams. Every night he sweated it out—the suffering and the tortures, and every night I felt I was resting next to a saint. There were always so many unspoken words and unfulfilled desires, and always we woke up with sunrise knowing what lay ahead for us.

Very few things broke this routine. One of them was David's going away. He had to go to Tel Aviv; he was sent there, for work, and I was left alone.

To be frank, I must say that it was a relief to say goodbye to him, and during his absence, though I did miss him, I never felt lonely.

I walked with him to the bus stop in the morning. We shook hands and he said:

"Have some rest, but don't wait for me."

"You will come back though?" I asked lightly.

"Of course. But don't wait for me. It's dreadful to know someone is waiting for you. Shalom." He got into the bus which turned to go, leaving behind it, in spite of the asphalt, a cloud of thin, transparent dust.

While I was watching, the in-coming bus pulled into the station, and among the familiar faces I noticed a strange new one. He was of medium height, very broad-shouldered and his clothes were shabby. His eyes had a strange expression of disbelief. I didn't like his expression and, in spite

of myself, asked him if he was looking for someone.

"Thank you. You are kind. I was sent here. I have to report to Natan, of the Jewish Agency. Do you know where I could find him?"

I wasn't curious about him, but knowing that David would have done the same, I offered to take him.

"Come, it's on my way. I'll show you the house. What is your name?"

"Marko."

"Where do you come from?"

"It's a long story. For the last five years I've been in prison, and I tell you this because I trust you. But I mean to start anew."

I have never heard Marko speak as freely since, and I shall never know what induced him to tell me this unpleasant detail. Naturally, I wanted to ask what he had been in jail for, but having shown him the agency house I wished him good luck and left him.

"My name is Yardena, if you need anything." This I didn't mean either. Why the goodness then? I didn't want to see Marko again. Not because of his past in jail, not because of his shabby clothes, but because of his look; and if I was attracted to David because of his eyes, it was the look in Marko's eyes that repelled me.

That evening I was alone in the house enjoying the hot silence, able to do everything in my

own way and at peace, when someone knocked on the door. "Just a moment!" I put on a pair of slacks under my dressing gown and opened the door. It was Marko. He had changed his shirt and combed his thin hair. He was nervous, as if expecting to be thrown out, but I asked him in.

"Coffee?"

"Don't bother. I won't stay long."

I made some coffee and brought him his cup. He didn't talk and I didn't feel like talking, so we sat facing each other in silence. He didn't seem to mind. He sipped his coffee, said he found work, and got up to go.

We shook hands. Marko had a tear in his eye and I felt embarrassed. "Thank you. It was my first evening and I didn't want to be all alone. Thank you."

How strong illusions are! I thought, here is Marko. I don't like him. He imposes himself on me, and I ask him in and give him a cup of coffee, and he believes that he is not alone in his new life. He is contented, and will sleep well, and go to work in the morning feeling cheerful. But who knows what the people will say or do when they hear of his background. And I was satisfied to think that I'd given him the illusion of being accepted while underneath I am just as conventional as the others may prove to be. And does David really think that by telling me not to wait he can prevent me? Does he think that by telling

me not to live for him I can stop my heart feeling the way it does? We should be grateful to God not for giving us the truth but for the little lies He allows us to pad our lives with, the false pink illusions, the make-believes, the corners of comfortable ignorance.

I decided to go to the Sunset Café. There were a few people sitting on the terrace, and in the corner, alone, was Marko again. I thought of pretending not to see him, but too late. My eye caught his, and he waved warmly. I nodded back and walked straight in. Rita was not there and I decided to wait, reading the papers. I wondered what David was doing alone in Tel Aviv where he knew nobody. Was he walking along the beach? Did he dine in a restaurant? I forgot the many years he had spent in the big hostile world and thought of him as a helpless village boy, going to town for the first time.

The people sitting at the table next to mine were whispering. I tried to listen. They talked about Marko. How fast secrets and unknown facts that can alter people's lives become public property. They talked about Marko and they knew. I was furious.

"All we need . . . They'll turn the city into a sort of Siberia!"

"Ex-convicts, and out before his time too, and who knows what he was in for!"

"Could be anything—murder, rape, or theft—and he looks so unpleasant too."

I hated them all then. I hated Marko for having caused it, and the inventive official who had sent him. I got up and walked toward Marko's table.

"May I?"

He grinned. I sat next to him. Everybody was watching us. I didn't do it out of generosity or conviction, I did it because they made me nervous.

"They know all about you, these people."

"I can't help it."

"Maybe it was a mistake, maybe you should have mingled with people in the big cities, there are thousands up there. There is no privacy here."

"I like it here."

"It's your business, but you'll regret it, I think. What were you in for anyway?"

"Forging checks. Does it matter?"

"No. Good luck to you. The first period will be tough, but perhaps they will get used to you—if you can stand isolation. Good night."

I waved to the other people and left for the house. It felt strange to go in knowing David would not be there for the night. The sheets felt humid and the bed uncomfortable. Only then, late at night, when the city relaxed its tense muscles and the calm of blackness took over, did I realize what was missing. Not David, whose absence I accepted, but his family. Wherever I looked there

were holes—empty holes like deep wounds. The windows looked like picture frames from which the oil paintings had been taken. The room grew larger and larger and emptier, and I missed them. I wanted to see Rivka in the corner and Avram on the white wooden chairs. He took his family away and told me not to wait, and he left me with a house which had been overpopulated and which was now as empty as a coffin. I begged them to come back, to reappear, to say good night to me, and all I could see was the whitewashed ceiling and the cement floor, the patterned curtains and my own dress thrown casually on the white chair.

I knew I would sleep better that night and hated this knowledge. I realized I was freer and I hated this freedom. I missed the dead as an alcoholic misses drink, or the addict his drug—knowing that it leads to destruction.

I did sleep well, and when I woke up the sun was high and hot.

It was a Saturday and I had nothing to do. I wanted to visit Leni but, after our last meeting, decided I never would. Rita was always busy on Saturdays, the architect was away, so was David. I felt vaguely sad, dull and pointless.

David must have sensed it, for he came back that night by the late Saturday night bus. I was reading in bed when I heard his footsteps. He opened the door and walked in, and I dared not

move in case I spoiled the magic. Whenever he came in I felt I was seeing him for the first time. And seeing him was always coupled with fear; perhaps he was a phantom, maybe I imagined him too.

"Yardena."

"Oh! You are early."

"I missed you, I didn't like Tel Aviv." He took off his jacket and put a large parcel on the bed.

"What is that?"

"Open it. It's for you."

"A present?"

"Open it, go ahead."

I loved opening parcels, whatever was inside them. I undid the knots and slowly removed the paper. There were several things in it, all neatly packed and arranged. There was a scarf, a white woolen scarf, which I flung round my shoulders. There were new table mats, brightly colored, coarsely woven. A pair of white sandals for me, and a book on modern art I had once said I wanted to read.

I was so excited. I kept looking at the things and back to David who wasn't sure what to say.

"It's for you, Yardena. I hope the sandals fit. Of course, it isn't much. I wasn't sure what would please you, so I brought several things."

I kissed him. My astonishment was greater than my joy.

"You brought me all these presents!" I kept exclaiming and kissing him. "I never thought you'd think of me like that."

"I won't be long," he said, and as he did every evening, he went out. He never suggested that I join him and I never knew when he would return. I gathered the presents in my arms, touched the scarf and the smooth soles of the sandals, and burst into tears.

I heard from Rita later that David went to the Sunset Café, which was most unusual. He sat in the only free chair—it was crowded on Saturday nights—next to Marko, and he ordered coffee and cake. Rita asked him where I was and he simply said— At home. He asked Marko his name and Marko answered him with respect and a little fear. They exchanged a few sentences, and after David had paid both bills they left the café and walked toward Leni's hut, where a dim light was showing. What happened in the hut? Did Marko's silence merge with Leni's and David's? Did they sit and think? Did David's saintliness affect Marko's sadness? Did they go down to the crater or touch Leni's stones? I shall never know. When David returned I was asleep.

Water! Singing water! Like a palm tree made of glass striving toward the sky, breaking and falling down like a million diamonds.

We were celebrating the new well. There was

enough water to keep the town going until the pipes from the north reached our area. We were all there, the whole city, around the cement square building, and the tap was opened to send these streams of life toward the desert sky.

There was a moment of silence when each drop was heard sinking into the sand, and following it they started singing.

. . . mayim mayim bessason . . .
havu lanu mayim mayim . . .

"Water is joy . . . Give us more water . . ." A dream had come true and my group of thirty children, eyes sparkling like the liquid pillar in front of them, started dancing, hand in hand, first slowly and then faster, competing with the grownups who formed a circle around them. They were dancing the *hora*, and each water drop infiltrating the tired layers of dust, sand, and sandstone, meant life and joy. The architect, active and gay, was wet. His brown curls stuck on his forehead, his hand clutched mine as he grabbed me—Dance Yardenal—I was swept with the song and the rhythm and could see Shoshana's face through the screen of water. She was singing and her black eyes shone.

She shouted something to me and I followed her movement. "Mayim—Shoshana!" I said. She nodded and smiled as if she had known all along that we were bound to hit the underground reser-

voir. Shoshana meant our future, and she was watching me as if gently saying—I told you all would be well.

I caught sight of Marko's boots. He was dancing clumsily, suspiciously watching the drops fall as if afraid to waste them, as if afraid the pillar would stop in mid-air, and no more water flow, as if wanting to hope but being afraid to—

"Marko! Mayim!" I shouted to him. Marko meant hope to me, and his boots left marks in the wet dust, heavy deep marks of expectation, and the water filled the marks and splashed when others stepped into them.

Marko was not singing, but Rita sang. Her voice was strong and pleasant and secure. Rita was at home, and she looked as if the water were all hers. To make coffee with, to add to the flour when she baked her cakes, to wash her thick hair with. Rita was dancing past me and I said to her—"Rita, Mayim! Mayim!" She smiled and seemed surprised that I didn't take it for granted, and danced on and on, wetting her face with the precious blue and white drops, and every dancing step of Rita's was secure and confident.

Leni watched us all. His bare feet were covered with mud and he was holding his small bag of stones. He didn't mean to smile, but his eyes betrayed him. Leni was happy.

"Leni! Mayim!" He rested the bag on the wet soil and broke into the children's circle. His bare

feet adjusted to the *hora* rhythm and Leni was dancing with us. Leni meant my dreams, and my dreams were there, with the children. His stones got wet and his blue eyes glittered like the blue drops and he was dancing . . . "David—Mayim!" I whispered. David wasn't there. "Mayim, David!" I whispered, and looked round to find him.

He was standing aside. Dry and untouched. He watched us hungrily, as if to move from his place and let his feet carry him with the dance was a tortuous process. He envied us—but dared not join. He coveted Shoshana, but couldn't hold her little hand. David was the past and he couldn't link with the future, or the present, or with me. David was alone, like the drops that floated away from the column of water and drifted with the wind to dry in the heat, useless and lost. I called out to him—"David, Mayim." He acknowledged me slightly and subtly, as if I had said something of great importance, but looking at him every time I danced past took away my enthusiasm. My step became slower and the architect noticed it—"Dance, Yardena!" he said.

"Not now." I broke away from them and walked toward David. He watched me approaching but didn't move.

"Aren't you happy?"

"I am more than happy."

"Why don't you dance then?"

"I am quite happy watching you, and Leni, and

Marko, and Shoshana dance. I cannot dance the *hora*, I never could."

"It's time you started," I snapped angrily.

"Not yet, Yardena. Shoshana is calling you"—She did, and I joined her. The dancing stopped, the stream slowed down and then was turned off. The water engineer adjusted the tap. The children played in the mud which the sun turned to clay.

"My mother is in Beersheba. In the hospital," Shoshana told me.

"Are you all alone then?"

"Yes."

"Would you like to stay with us tonight? Come along."

She smiled. She would, she said. "It would be wonderful," she said.

I went over to David. "Shoshana is staying with us tonight. You will have to sleep on the blanket on the floor, like the first night, I am afraid."

"I'll go away."

"No you won't. Her mother is ill, and we'll have dinner with her. You must tell her a story before she goes to sleep and make her feel at home."

"I can't. Please, Yardena—" This was the first time I had heard this tone in David's voice. He was scared. His eyes showed fear; he wasn't a shadow, a transparent entity. He was there, a scared man.

"Come, Shoshana," I said. "We'll all go home and celebrate."

I took her hand in mine and Shoshana insisted on holding David's hand as well. His eyes were darker than ever and he walked just as if Shoshana's fingers burnt his palm.

We reached the house as it was growing dark outside. I cooked the meal and David pretended to be busy reading. Shoshana looked at picture books in the room. We sat down at the table with Shoshana next to David.

"Would you help me cut my meat?" she asked him.

"Yardena will." he said.

I talked to her. He watched us almost belligerently.

"I'll leave you two for a while and go for a walk."

"Won't you tell me a story?" She asked him.

"Yardena will."

He got ready to go.

"May I kiss you good night?"

"Of course you may," I hurried to say before he could refuse.

Shoshana walked slowly toward him. He was standing near the door, tall and stern, not bending down or holding out his hand.

"You are too tall for me, you'll have to bend down," she laughed.

Her laughter echoed in the room and hurt me.

He bent and turned his cheek to her. He had pain in his eyes, and when Shoshana gaily kissed him he closed them, and when he opened his eyes they were wet.

"Good night," he said, in a choked voice, and left the room.

Shoshana helped me to dry the dishes and I told her a story. She felt things were wrong, and she was restless.

"Where does he go when he goes for a walk?"

"Different places. Perhaps he went to see Leni, perhaps to the water tap."

"He is funny."

"Funny? David? No he is not. He is very serious, and he has suffered a lot, and he is a very kind man."

"He is funny too, because he wants to tell me stories and he doesn't, and he wants me to kiss him and pretends to be unhappy about it."

She spoke more but I dared not answer; then she fell asleep, there on our bed. The moon threw its wan light on Shoshana's curls. People in the café were still celebrating, but she was relaxed and quiet now. I covered her softly and arranged a few blankets on the floor for David and for me. I wanted to wait for him, but fell asleep before he returned. When I woke up, it was past midnight. I didn't move, but I could see Shoshana's bed under the window, and next to it was a chair.

David was sitting in the chair, his eyes wide open, and he was watching her. His face was gently lit by the moon, and there were tears in his eyes. He watched Shoshana and covered her up whenever she turned in her bed. His long fingers were nervously playing with a doll she had brought with her, and he never moved.

We spent the whole night like this. Shoshana sleeping soundly, David watching her; and I, from the dark corner, watching both of them. With the dawn, he moved his chair, wiped his eyes, paused near me for a second and walked out. I was careful not to disturb Shoshana.

"Did you sleep well?" I asked.

"I didn't sleep. I watched the little girl." He never lied to me. I don't know why I thought he would.

"I am sorry I asked. I saw you sitting there and watching. You must be tired."

"Don't ever do that, Yardena. It's like spying. When you wake up and pretend to be asleep it's like lying to me. This is precisely what makes me uncomfortable."

"I'm sorry."

"You are always watching me, aren't you? When we are with other people you only look at me. When we are alone, you follow with inquisitive eyes every movement I make. We should

live our own separate lives. What we have in common is there anyway, don't you understand that?"

"I am sorry. I try not to be like that but I care too much. You always look as if you were about to disappear. That's why I watch you. I am afraid."

"You made her kiss me last night, why? You know it hurts me, you know I can't take it. Are you experimenting with me? I don't want to dance the Mayim dance. I don't want to be kissed by little girls who remind me of Rivka. I don't want to sing. Can't you see it all? It's not a game." He was speaking fast and he was nervous. I had touched him where he didn't care to be touched. I was angry too.

"Stop being so selfish. There are other people, and I am not experimenting. I do understand, but you forget that you are alive, and being alive you have a duty to other people too."

We woke up Shoshana. There is nothing more warm and beautiful than a child waking up. With the slow motion of a dream dissolving, little hands rubbing the eyes—a smile—eyes shut again, and then open to look at us. She got out of bed sleepily, and walked up to David.

"I dreamt about you. We were playing a game in my dream."

He stroked her hair. "I have to go to work. Shalom."

I gave Shoshana a glass of milk, dressed her and sent her home.

Here I was, alone again, depressed again, more confused than before. The town was growing around me, and the healthy sound of streams from taps had been added to its atmosphere. Everything grew and matured in the city, but I seemed to be left behind. Didn't I fit? Was it only because of David? Why couldn't I be a part of it? I did love it all, even the ugly square cement houses were dear to me. Yet I felt I was away from it—touching and leaving, ready to hug, but pushing away. Leni was right, of course. I lacked passion. I should go away for a while, but I couldn't think of leaving the children. David should go away—but he had just returned from a trip and nothing had changed.

I put on the new sandals he had given me. Patience, I thought, he will have to learn to be with me. If I can only last long enough, to wait and accept him when he comes of his own accord.

The trees could be irrigated now that we had found water, and we could wash the dust from our balconies too, perhaps even wash the ashes away.

I needed help, and there was nobody to go to.

I envied Shoshana who could make David cry while everything I did to please him seemed an imposition. I stopped at Rita's on my way to work.

"Would you like some coffee?"

"No, Rita, mayim," I said.

She laughed. "As much as you want, Yardenal!" Rita knew something was wrong, but I couldn't ask for her help. Marko was there on the terrace having his breakfast and watching people go to work. I sat with him for a few moments. He had gotten a job and he was pleased with life.

"Don't you mind the loneliness?"

"Do you think I had better company in jail?"

"I didn't mean it like that."

"Do you mind your loneliness?"

"I have David."

"That's what I meant."

So he knew too. I opened the new tap in the yard and watched the laughing drops. I washed my face, trying to wash away all the uncomfortable and the unknown.

SWEAT

The fields were white, yet it wasn't snow. The sky was black but the sun shone and I was running naked in mid-air, between the white and the black toward the red horizon.

Stop! David shouted. I stopped and meant to breathe deeply when his voice sounded. Don't stop, Run! I kept running. Now I was running in circles till I could see no more, and cutting the air his voice again—Laugh! I tried to smile, and he shouted—Laugh! I laughed loudly and he yelled—Don't laugh! I kept running—Walk!—Stop!—Cry! That was easy. I felt the tears on my frozen cheeks. I don't know if I was walking or flying, but he told me to cry, which I did. Don't ever cry!—he yelled —Run!—Stop! Again I stopped. I couldn't move. He ordered me to go on. I fell to the ground. My wings were broken and I could not talk. I could hear him telling me to run, but I could not lift my head to tell him my wings were broken. His voice became weak and distant now and my body shrunk until it became a black spot shining in the snow—and it started snowing. The gentle flakes covered the spot, and I woke up. I was covered all over with a cold thin layer of sweat. My feet were cold and

wet. Perhaps I *had* walked on snow? My hands trembled.

"You are sweating," he said.

"I was dreaming."

"A bad dream?"

"I don't know, David. I don't know if it is bad."

"You should dry yourself. You're sweating badly."

"I'll have a shower, but I will sweat again. My dreams scare me."

"You should learn to sleep well, like I do."

I knew I was ill. Nobody would be able to tell me what the disease was, but I felt I was ill. It was physical too. My head was always aching, and my limbs were weak and painful. I felt dizzy in the mornings, and restless and depressed every evening toward nightfall. I seldom slept well, and nightmares at night and visions during the day exhausted me. I couldn't think clearly. Faces never seemed clear or images sharp any more, and the city around me appeared and faded away. At times it wasn't there, and though I walked in the main street, I could see only the dunes and the crater, and on some mornings it was all larger than life. The houses, the cars, the words that people said to me, powerful and strangling. It must have been insignificant, because it had happened so often before, but one Friday night I couldn't find David. Only this time I felt sure that he had gone forever.

I was not alarmed or unhappy about it. I came back to the house and David was not there. It got late and still he didn't come, and I stopped expecting him. I could see his family, but they had lost their substance and were hiding in corners, blurred and shadowless, quiet, like sleeping cats and as ineffective as David's absence.

I knew he would not come back when I combed my hair and took off my clothes, and I thought of the children's paintings I had with me. I spread the thin colorful papers on the floor and smiled. There was a train, a purple train drawn by Yossi, and its steam was yellow. There was a large drawing of an old man which Shoshana gave me. The man's beard was red and his cane was blue. His face had no features or details; he looked like David's father. The light breeze lifted the papers and tossed them around, and I could not be bothered to assemble them.

After midnight I put out the lights and went to bed. That night I could sleep away from the wall . . . if I could only sleep. I heard David's voice—you have got to sleep . . . Sleep well—I got up and without putting on the lights went to the bathroom. There were sleeping pills there which David used to take. I took a few, and his voice was commanding and strong— You've got to sleep . . . sleep . . . sleep! I took a few more and returned to bed. It didn't work. My head felt heavy but my eyes refused his orders. All my nerves seemed ac-

tive; my toes played with the sheets; my legs stretched. My thighs felt hard and tense, and my stomach flat and intense. My breast ached and my hands were restless. My tongue was dry and my brain numb. I walked back to the bathroom to take more pills. I have to sleep. Tomorrow is Saturday and I can sleep late, very late. I don't have to wake up at dawn or make breakfast because David is gone, and before he went away he told me to sleep. I took more pills, and in my dressing gown stepped outside. I thought of taking a relaxing walk to let the pills start work and then return to sleep. Let me explain here that not for one moment did it occur to me that it is dangerous to take pills. Not for a brief second did I contemplate death or want to cause alarm. I was tired, I felt old and unclean, I felt an exhausting agony and I wanted to sleep, just for one night to sleep well.

I walked for a few moments and met nobody. There was no light at Leni's so I didn't go there. I wanted to go to the crater, but the crater kept moving away toward the horizon—further and further and further till I wasn't sure it was there.

My head felt very heavy and my hands very cold when I decided to go home. I wanted to run home but my feet were nailed to the grains of sand, and I don't know whether I walked or remained in one spot. Suddenly the city was not in front but above me, and its few Friday-night lights joined the Milky Way, which was like a steel

ribbon moving slowly to a strange tune. On the Milky Way traveled Yossi's purple train with its yellow steam, and Shoshana's old faceless man guided it with his blue cane . . .

There was nothing more humiliating in my life than the experience I went through when I woke up.

Twenty-four hours I had slept, I was told, and when I opened my eyes I met David's angry eyes.

My natural reaction was a smile and a good morning, but the smile soon died and I tried to stand up.

I fell down, and David helped me back to bed.

"You are sweating," he said. His voice was cold and cut the air between us like a blade.

"But I slept well, so very well. You told me to sleep." I found it difficult to talk, to move my lips. I kept biting my tongue and I had no way of controlling my muscles.

"Yes, you slept. You were wicked to do what you did."

"How?" I smiled. His seriousness amused me.

"We thought you were dying. Someone found you asleep near the house. We called the doctor, he gave you injections. You will be all right in a few days. But you had no right to do a thing like that."

"I wanted to sleep. I am hungry now."

He brought me a bowl of soup. I took the spoon and tried to help myself. I spilled it on the white sheet. I couldn't swallow, I couldn't lift the spoon

to my mouth. I laughed. "It's funny, I can't eat."

David fed me. He stuck the spoon into my mouth and closed my lips over it with his hand. I felt ridiculous. I remembered now that he was gone on Friday night, and wondered why he was here again.

"But you were away," I said.

"It was my day to fight with God. It was on a Friday my sister died, and I had to be alone. I was down in the crater."

"I want to sleep now."

He left me and I pulled the sheet over my head. When he went out of the room I stumbled to the mirror. A funny face was reflected. Loose muscles, dropped jaw, and heavy unattractive features. I laughed again. David's image was in the mirror. He frightened me.

"Go back to bed. You'll fall over and hurt yourself."

"I can make it," I said, but stepping forward, fell. He caught my arm in time, and his grip was unpleasant.

An enormous screen of misunderstanding hung between us. David thought I wanted to attract his attention by making myself ill; he thought I had done it because he was out on Friday evening; he thought it was an ugly thing to do.

For a few days we didn't talk at all. I recovered fast, and when I felt strong enough I went back to work. The air had a strange new quality for

me, and all colors were brighter. The children's laughter was gayer than ever before, and every shape had meaning. Marko knew about the "incident" as they called it. He smiled when he saw me. "Silly girl," he said. I didn't want to have to explain, so I did not answer. Rita was in a state of panic, I was told, when they found me, and I avoided her for a while. When we met after a week or so we ignored the subject and carried on as before, only there was an unusual warmth in her voice when she talked to me. I was afraid of meeting Leni because I had almost proved him right. When we did meet, and it was accidental, he asked me about Shoshana, who visited him, and we both knew we were avoiding a subject we wanted to discuss. And David was a master of evasiveness. Things he didn't care for were simply not there, and topics he wanted to avoid became nonexistent. With one look he had the capacity to remove happenings or push them below the surface. As I came closer to him after the incident, he was pushed away. I needed him more than before, and he was more distant than ever. He hated tears, he hated illness, and my long, long sleep left a gap between us which I was unable to bridge.

During my convalescence, I asked myself many times what my love for David was based upon, what caused it, what magic power did this man have over me? He was not attractive or good-looking in the ordinary sense; he was not charming.

His honesty scared me, and his habits were those of a man cultivating aloofness and needing nobody.

Was it my conscience? That was what Leni thought. Or was it his selfishness? But then, he wasn't selfish but selfless; he was not egocentric—but nothing else stood in the center of his existence. Was it the fact that we never made contact? If I finally touched him somewhere, would my own love last? And why did he stay with me? Worried and disturbed by these questions, unanswerable yet tormenting, I went alone to the crater one night.

It was a crystal clear night, and the minute I took the path that led down to it the city was lost behind the cliff, and when the city was out of sight, it ceased to exist for me.

When I walked down, every step was accompanied by a thought—Does he? Do I? Do we? Shall we? The last step, before I reached the lower plateau left me wondering—and all these thoughts? Aren't they hypothetical? And this analysis, isn't it destructive in itself? All the questions we ask, picking our brains and twisting our hearts. Full face, profile and looked at from above, of our feelings, indignations and motives, doesn't it all become a dreadful mathematical nightmare? Turning the round soft unknowns into square defined sentences, trying to bring together proc-

esses of thought which perhaps ought never to meet?

Isn't it all a substitute for the real thing, for real living, natural and free? But how to stop this mad race—the mind trying to beat the heart to the well of knowledge; how to stop this tense turning around of every word spoken, this permanent surgery of my own faculties and those of the people around me?

The crater accepted me like the beautiful palm of a manly hand. I was a dwarf in it; how comfortable to be so. If the whole world was a warm closed secure crater I would have liked to walk in it forever. Opposite me shone a range of granite rocks, and to my right the sandstone, bright and white, towered like a wall of salt. I stepped on stones, knowing that Leni knew them all, and walked to my favorite place—a group of marble rocks in the center of the valley.

I had never spent much time alone in the crater. I was afraid of its isolated steadiness, because it reminded me too much of David. Two camels crossed it, silently.

I was lying on my back and watching the stars when I heard voices behind me. I was afraid to move and held my breath. It could only be someone I knew. David was working the night shift, but it could be Marko, or Leni—yet I heard the voice of a woman.

They didn't come closer, and apparently were sitting and resting behind my black rocks.

A few moments later the light breeze stopped and I could hear the voices more clearly.

"It is wonderful to come down here every night, when everything else is over."

It was Rita's voice with her rich Hungarian accent. I didn't know Rita ever came down here. Leni was with her, and his voice was gentler than ever.

"Come nearer, Rita. It is the best bed I can offer you, and the best light. Listen to the desert's caressing sounds . . ."

The most embarrassing thing is to be in the presence of people making love, hidden and unnoticed. Shall I cough and walk by? Shall I lie here and listen? My youth maybe, my curiosity, and that same embarrassment made me stay.

Leni and Rita were making love, there, on his stones, under my sky and away from Rita's city.

They were very close to me and I could hear her breathing heavily. I could hear her body move and I knew she was enjoying it. Rita loved Leni, and her love for him was there in the air, it filled the crater, and embraced the black rocks. It stroked the granite range and covered the white sandstone mountain. Leni was talking to her and then gasping, and afterwards there was the happy silence that I never knew.

"You forgive me, Rita, don't you, for everything? I pay for my behavior."

"I was patient, Leni. I knew you would want my love one day, even if I had to fight all your stones."

"My stones don't matter. I'll give them all to you."

"I want you. I want your child, Leni."

"I must tell you something, Rita. I am not Jewish. I don't talk about it, because to me it's of no importance, but you ought to know."

She laughed, warm, loud laughter.

"Do you think it matters? Here? You own the crater, Leni, and this nature is yours, and the air is yours and it's all free, and you thought it would make a difference?"

"I only wanted you to know."

I understood Rita's laughter. It didn't matter. Leni belonged where he chose to belong, not by ancestral right or religious duty. He was here, and this was all his, and maybe it was childish of him to even mention it.

"Kiss me, Rita . . ."

I was jealous. I knew Leni would never want me again. He had made his choice, and his loyalty was almost a physical quality he could never shed, like the blueness of his eyes or the breadth of his chest. I was jealous because I wanted to be made love to, outside, under the moving stars. I wanted

to be touched by strong living hands and pressed to the sand and stones of our ageless desert. They were like Adam and Eve, truthful and clean, and David was working in the water plant which was as far from my black rocks as the Milky Way was.

It was then that I felt the first physical contact with David's family.

Until that night they watched me and followed me. They were ever present, but they remained at a distance. Now, when Leni talked to Rita, they came nearer, and when his hands touched her body they touched mine.

Airy creepy hands slid along my arms when Leni hugged Rita, and Avram and Rivka cuddled next to me. It was a weird sensation, not unpleasant, not unreal, it was quite touching. They were lost souls and they sought my warmth, and I let them surround me, smell my skin and feel its smoothness.

I waited till I could see Leni's and Rita's long silhouettes disappear behind the range, and not feeling alone any more, climbed the path myself. I went to the water plant to see whether David was through with his work. He was talking to Marko and I could hear my name mentioned. I stood behind the cement building and the light from a floodlamp isolated them in a bright circle.

Marko was reproaching David. "You needn't have come here tonight, I could take care of the extra work. You've got Yardena to take care of."

"I know, but she likes to be alone at times. It's all right." I joined them.

"Sorry to disturb you, I have been for a walk." David never seemed surprised when I turned up. Either he always expected me, or it didn't mean anything to him; I never knew which. Marko was uncomfortable and excused himself.

"We can go now, I am tired," David said, and we stepped away from the circle of light to go back home.

On the way I told David about my walk. I told him I had heard Leni making love to Rita, and I told him Leni was not Jewish.

To my great surprise David stopped abruptly.

"He is not Jewish?"

"Why, no, does it matter?"

"Yes."

I asked him to explain it to me, but he wouldn't. He just kept turning to look toward Leni's hut and repeating, "So he is not Jewish."

I tried to guess what amazed him so much. Was it the fact that Leni chose the hard way, in spite of not being Jewish? Was he upset not having known it? Was he reluctant to share the desert with a non-Jew? I asked, but he didn't hear my questions so I left it at that.

When we returned home and I made some tea, he came into the kitchen.

"I want to tell you a story, Yardená, a bedtime tale."

"Of course. A funny one?"

"No."

We undressed and put out the light. I was lying on my back, and he sat on the edge of the bed looking at me as if making sure that every word penetrated . . .

"Let me take you a few years back with me. Try and forget the black earth, forget your name is Yardena. Forget your new sandals and tanned arms and Shoshana's smile. Only if you leave all these behind can you understand what happened over there.

"It was a chilly morning, and the day before I gave my shoes to a child who needed them. I woke up and my feet were frozen. I couldn't stand or walk.

"When we were ordered out I had to walk, and though I didn't feel my legs, I marched in line. Not will power, fear again, the fear you don't have out here, saved me many times.

"We marched to a gate and numbers were called. I didn't pay attention as I thought we were being sent to work. Someone, an old sick man, who was standing next to me, whispered, 'They send the ones to the right to work, but those who go left go to the gas chambers.' He laughed hysterically: 'Right is life—and left is death.' His yellow beard was frozen and he had no teeth left, he was laughing and praying. The man was going insane in front of me. He pulled my arm and kept saying

in a singing voice, 'The man who goes left is going to die. He will go up in smoke, and the man who goes right is going to work.' . . . Are you listening, Yardená? You have got to listen. When we came nearer the gate I noticed that the officers were bored with the job and they did it automatically now—one to the right—one to the left, one to live and one to the gas chambers. The old man was dancing now and I quickly counted the people in front of me—left—right—left—right—and me. I was doomed, I thought. If they go on like this I'll take this road in the snow. Then fear made me do something which I'll never forgive myself for doing. I sneaked in, ahead of the young man in front of me, and I prayed that they would continue as before. He was a tall blond boy—Leni's blue eyes remind me of him. He was a Pole, and I had exchanged a few words with him at times. He was not Jewish, Yardená, and considered himself lucky to be a Pole. He thought he was better off. I was in front of him now, and he put his arm on my shoulder, sympathizing with my frozen toes. I dared not look at him, and when our turn came I was pushed to the right and given a spade, and he was directed to the left and took the path leading up to the chilly air.

"After walking a few steps with the others, I realized what I had done and turned to push my way back. A tall officer kicked me and sent me with the others to bury the dead or cover them.

I watched the Pole walking. I don't think he knew what it was all about, but I saw the old man dancing around him, singing and laughing and praying—Are you listening, Yardená? I pushed my way to life—and worse. For many months I forgot the Pole. I did not feel guilt, or shame. We were all scared. I was only fifteen, and I pushed my way to life.

“Only when the war was over I started seeing him again, and feeling his hand comforting me on my shoulder. He died for me without a prayer, and I sent him there, and I think he forgave me as he died. Either that or he didn't understand it at all.

“When I first met Leni I saw the Pole again, but I thought Leni was a Jew, and so it couldn't be the same blue eyes. It doesn't matter now. Many more dreadful things happened to me when I was fifteen, but I want you to know that I pushed my way past a man to save my unworthy soul . . .

“That night when I was talking to Marko and Leni I had an urge to tell them this story, there was something pure about those two men, and I couldn't bear the stain so I had to confess. When I told them the story Leni hugged me and cried. He said he would have done the same, but somehow I don't believe it.

“Yardená, where does one stop being an animal? Where does the godly in us come to the surface? Is the wish to live a justification of murder? I

envy Marko, he sinned and sat in jail and paid for it, but where shall I take my guilt? Who is the God who can judge us all?

"I saw my father once after this happened, and I cried like a baby when I told him what happened. He said God forgave me, and God gave me the strength to do it because He wanted me to live. Who is the God who wants one person to live and another to die? When I looked in a mirror after the war, and saw my shaved skull, the blue eyes stared at me and I refused to let the look invade me. You told me once that there is no depth in my eyes. I put up a screen to cover my pupils because I was afraid of the Pole's blue eyes, and since then I don't let any eyes see deeper because I am afraid they'll meet his figure deep in there, walking to the left, strong and guiltless.

"It is late, and you should sleep now. Forget about it if you want to. My father forgave me."

David grasped my hand and brought it awkwardly to his lips. I pulled him toward me.

The following week involved us in army maneuvers in the area. Our city was near to the Jordanian border, but we had never been conscious of the fact. The tanks groaned their way into town covered with dust and camouflage nets, enormous animals, patient and steady. A tank never looks out of place in the dunes; it fits the way rocks or camels do. On and in the tanks

were the artillery boys, some I knew from my army days, and all with a familiar look of strength and superiority. They changed the mood of the town. Old Iraqi Jews touched the metal with holy respect, children were allowed into the armored trucks, and women mothered the soldiers. Rita's café was always crowded with boys whose curly hair was the color of the metal and whose eyes shone like the barrels of the guns. If before the town had ticked to the pace of hard work and quiet family life, it awoke now to daily drilling, and nights were spent around the fire not far from Leni's hut, where stories were told of past and future adventures, and the accordion cried battle songs into the darkness.

Rami was a division commander, and though he was busy during the day training people, we met every evening at Rita's.

Rami was not tall, but he looked as though he was. He had dark hair and green laughing eyes, and though he often came face to face with death he was an excitable boy. Rami was the first man I had ever loved, and it had happened during my army service. Distance and time separated us, but when he showed me that he could drive down to the crater in his jeep—and we drove fast up and down the slippery sand hills—the nightmares, the "incident," Leni and David receded, and I was a girl again, playing games and enjoying speed and laughter.

I asked Rami to come to dinner, and the jeep's

headlights rested on our house which was dark and mysterious.

"No lights, Deni?" He still called me Deni, a name the soldiers had given me when I was a teacher in the division.

"I am sorry. I suppose David is out." We walked up the few steps and the door was opened from inside. David was there.

"You like the dark?" Rami asked, laughing.

"Do lights always light a house?"

I knew it wouldn't work. David was not in the mood to communicate, and Rami would never understand him. Over dinner Rami told us about the division's exploits in the Sinai campaign, and how they entered Gaza. He was proud, he was childish, he was wonderful.

. . . Thin grass covered the hills, Rami remembered, and the orange groves around Gaza glittered with gold and green when the floodlamps searched them. "They ran away, we didn't have a chance to shoot much, they fled."

"Do you hate the Arabs?" David asked.

"Hate them? No, of course not. I fight them though, I killed some. It is my duty to, you know — Say, are you going to marry Deni?"

I blushed. It was a question I had never dared to ask David.

"Marry Yarden? We have never talked about it, so there is no point in talking about it now. Excuse me . . ."

He got up, took his plate to the kitchen and left the house, leaving the front door open.

Rami played with my hair. He was earnest now, though his eyes still laughed.

"What kind of man is he?"

"I don't know, Rami. I love him. I don't know him and he bothers me a great deal. There are so many things we don't know about each other."

"You mean the camps, and world war, and Jews in Europe? Perhaps we never will be able to understand."

"I shall know that I tried. I know how you feel inside a tank, or along the road to Gaza, I know your songs and the gold of oranges, but I have yet to learn about the other things too."

"Yardena, you have changed, but I still love you. What strange characters you've got here. This madman, Leni. We almost shelled him by mistake. He was collecting stones in the training area. And Marko, you introduced me to him the other night. He has just come out of jail, and wouldn't talk to me. And now David, who disappears, and Rita—I don't know her well, but God. Don't you miss everything else?"

He was sad now. "We discovered life slowly and delicately, but with laughter. Even when we were disappointed, it was with a smile after the tears. It seems to me that your life now is only the other side of the coin. This means—no balance. When we were together we opened doors,

and removed barriers, and stepped into rooms on tiptoe, and if we liked what we saw inside we drank it in. We leaped through other doors if what we found was distasteful. You have gone into a different room, with no door marked 'Exit,' and I don't believe you like what you find there."

"Let's not talk about it, Rami! Let's have fun! Come!" I pulled him by the hand, through the door, leaving it open, toward Rita's café. Gideon was playing the accordion and people were dancing. I don't know why, but I needed to run or to dance; I needed movement.

"Let's dance! Polka! The wonderful dizzy whirl of the polka." The strong hands led me, holding my waist, lifting me up in the air. Play, Gideon! We danced the polka . . . I took my shoes off and danced in bare feet. I was a bird, I was a butterfly, I was an angel flying, I was an eagle soaring to summits of joy. The Sunset Café smelled of sweat and jasmine, my sweat, Rami's sweat—Gideon's. I think Rami told me he loved me. I didn't pay much attention, or listen to anything else he said. We were dancing the polka, and with each step sensations and feelings long forgotten came to life . . . When I could dance no more, Rami took me out for fresh air. Rami kissed my mouth, and dried my sweat. David was there watching. I knew he was watching us and I clung to Rami as if David were about to murder me—Kiss me, I said.

David stood there, his hands in his pockets, watching us without interest, without envy, motionless. When he turned to walk away, and I felt the burden of his stare removed from my backbone, I said good night to Rami.

I walked to the house behind David. There were a few feet between us. He didn't slow down, and I didn't hurry my step. We walked separated, and I followed him as if pulled by a magic black thread, and though he never looked back he knew I was there.

He walked through the open door and left it open for me. When I came in he took me in his arms and kissed me.

"I was never jealous before," he said. "I discovered jealousy today. Thank you."

My face was red. Was I blushing with shame or still hot from the dance? I don't know.

His hands were strong now, holding my waist.

"I would like to learn to dance the polka," he said.

"You don't need to. It doesn't mean anything. I am sorry about all this."

"No, don't be. He kissed you, and I felt you were my woman and I wanted you."

He wiped the sweat from his forehead. It was the first time I had seen David sweating. If he could sweat, perhaps he could cry, perhaps he could laugh, perhaps he could love?

PART 3

STONES

Winter in the desert meant frustration. Shrieking winds which brought no clouds. High clouds which carried no rain, and thin drops of rain which carried no life. Patches of green which disappeared after a day or two, leaving behind the yellow dry grass which mocked our expectations. The screeching of eagles nesting in the cliffs was a warning which carried no meaning, and the gazelles elegantly crossing the plateau hurried nowhere. The nights were long now and the sun remote and gentle, mothers knitted thick woolen sweaters, and the children wearing them had to fight the wind working their way to the kindergarten every morning.

People were more relaxed now, more withdrawn; they perspired less and talked less.

David made some friends and spent evenings with them, and I saw much more of Rita.

I grew very fond of her. She had become more a part of the city than any of us ever could, and she was probably the only one to call it home with confidence. Rita was grotesque in a way, but not funny, just touching.

We were sitting in her kitchen one gloomy afternoon.

"You are putting on weight, Rita, it's becoming, but don't overdo it."

"No, Deni" (since she had heard Rami call me Deni she used it affectionately at times), "I am pregnant."

"How? How long?" I was alarmed. I did not find it immoral, or shocking. It only seemed strange that Rita, sitting in front of me peeling potatoes, had a living creature in her belly. It was unexpected; she was not young, and I wondered if the baby would have Leni's blue eyes.

"It's Leni's baby," she said.

"Leni loves you. He must be very happy about it."

"He does not know."

"But you've got to tell him! Are you afraid to?" She smiled. Rita had an evasive nervous smile. She was not afraid; she didn't want to impose it on him. She wouldn't tell him. Rita talked about the baby's prospects as if it were a grown-up child already.

She expected to give birth in the spring and she wondered whether the hospital would be ready by then. She wanted it to be the first child born in the city. She would be proud if it was the first child to be born in the new city.

She said there were no graves in the city yet, and it was a sign of good luck if the first birth occurs before the first death, and baby carriages arrive before marble gravestones.

She thought the child would help Leni collect stones in the crater, and she believed Leni would rather have a daughter. A blond blue-eyed girl who would walk barefooted down the path with him, and would help him brush and clean the stones when they found them.

I could almost hear the baby when Rita talked, and I could see Leni protecting the child when the sandstorms swept the city.

"But you have to tell him. I don't believe anything would make him happier."

"No, Yardena. This would mean contact with reality, with humanity, with the city. This would mean shoes and aprons, and hospital and diapers, and Leni's world is devoid of these things. I am afraid he wouldn't want the child."

When I left Rita I was feeling sad, envious and frightened. I didn't want a child any more. I was afraid of David's children, as I was afraid of his brother and sister. I thought David's children would never be happy, gay children. I thought they would be born with numbers tattooed on their little red arms. I knew Leni's child would master the desert; I thought mine would strangle it with sorrow, or flood it with tears.

I had to tell Leni. I knew it was wrong, but I understood Rita's fears and Leni had to know.

One of Leni's best stones had broken. It fell from the shelf, hit a marble and broke in two.

He was watching the pieces—contemplating.

“My stones fight each other, like jealous women.”

“You can put the pieces together, can’t you?”

He was leaning over the broken stone and didn’t turn his head as we talked.

“No, broken stones have to remain broken. There can be beauty in that too. I don’t mean to be symbolic or serious, forget about it. How are you?”

“Fine. Have you seen Rita lately?”

“I see Rita every day. I’d rather not talk about it. It makes me feel guilty. I don’t deserve her love, as David doesn’t deserve yours.”

“Leni. Look at me.”

He fumbled with the stones. “Look at me, Leni, I’ve got to tell you something.”

He straightened up. “What do you have in mind?”

His stare pierced me. I didn’t think he felt like talking or seeing me. There was no way out though and I simply said, “Rita is pregnant. It is your baby. She is afraid to tell you but I think you ought to know.” Leni took a red-and-green granite stone from the shelf and touched it fondly. He was still looking at me and his rough fingers caressed the surface of the stone.

“You are going to be a father, Leni,” I repeated, as his face conveyed no excitement or

understanding. He threw the red-and-green stone against a large pillar and it broke into beautiful glittering pieces.

"Are you angry?"

Leni did not answer me. He took an armful of stones and started breaking them. Small ones which wouldn't break he threw out of the window; some, which were his favorite stones, he touched first and then broke or threw away.

And then he stopped. Abruptly. His eyes expressed regret and self-disgust. I knew he could not play the game any longer, and did he ever really care this much about the stones? Did he ever really believe he cared this much?

The indifference in his stare at them was that of a cured alcoholic, and I almost felt sorry for the marbles which looked small and insignificant. They were nameless now, and if for months he had slowly injected life and meaning into each one, in one stroke he killed them all; and ignoring me as well, he walked out of the hut.

I searched for David; he could explain to me what was happening. Had I angered Leni? Was the problem solved? Would the child be a substitute for the stones? Had I harmed Rita?

When I approached the pumping station I noticed an unusual commotion there. It looked as if the men were arguing, and I remained at a distance, watching and listening.

Marko was standing there surrounded by workers.

"Why did you come here in the first place?" someone asked him loudly.

"It is my home as much as it is yours."

"No, it isn't," a tall tough-looking man urged. "You belong to the prison you left a short time ago, why did they let you out anyway?"

"We don't need bloody criminals here."

"There is no room here for filthy bastards."

"Are you looking for trouble? Why don't you disappear?"

They closed the circle around him. He did not answer. He looked old and helpless and they tossed him around—not touching him, but every word fell on him like a blow. Marko didn't react, but David did.

I held my breath. There he was, looking as he had when he first came to the city: saintly, ghostly, superior, and strange.

"Shut up!" he said. I was startled. I had never dreamed of David using such language or such a tone.

"It's none of your business, don't protect criminals!" said someone. I heard the slap because it echoed with a ring that the desert had never heard before, and the tense silence which followed it was the shrieking silence that the winter wind leaves behind. The man David struck looked at him with fury, but he had to

lower his eyes. David's face was tranquil and expressionless as if he were not really there. The men dispersed and David put his arm around Marko's shoulder. Marko was sobbing and quivering and David led him away. The men turned to watch them, but none dared speak or move. The crater tossed the sound of the slap from the rocks to the granite cliffs to the white sandstone range; and when the echo was dimmed, a profound breeze of respect filled the air.

They didn't notice me as I ran to the house to be with my man. Marko was in the house and David was comforting him.

"It was bound to happen. People are like that. It will never recur, don't worry. They got it out of their systems and they'll know better now. You don't have to leave." Marko's eyes were red and swollen. He was trembling all over like a dying animal.

"I'll go away, I'll start anew. I didn't hurt anybody here. I cannot look forward to anything here any more, and now I have gotten you into trouble too." David smiled. "Don't be foolish. I don't care what they think. You are going to stay here, forever. It's all over now, I know these people."

When Marko noticed that I was there he started crying again from shame now. I repeated David's words and he got up, hugged me, and walked away. David didn't want to talk about it,

and when I told him about Leni he smiled in a peculiar way, as if he had known all along, or as if he could read our thoughts whether he was there or not, or as if he was living everybody's lives and struggling through all our experiences. He only said, "Leni will leave the city now, but he will be back in time," and then went out for his walk.

On winter nights I seldom left the house. I had my work and my books, my knitting and my music. On that winter night three men walked in different directions along the unpaved paths in the darkness. Leni was walking, absent-mindedly talking to himself. He stopped to drink every once in a while and when the flask was empty he tossed it away and let it roll down, listening to the sound with an angry smile of satisfaction. He never looked down; he could have been walking in the main street of Tel Aviv. Marko was trying to walk off his shame and fear, reconstructing the scene and repeating aloud David's words, and David walked slowly, pensive and aloof, thinking of me.

A few minutes before I was ready to leave the house the next morning the architect knocked on the door. He had bad news. His face looked gray and his eyes—for the first time—sad and meaningful.

"Shoshana's mother died last night in Beer-sheba. I was called up. You will have to tell her." Shoshana had no father, and was the youngest of the family. Her sister was about to get married and leave the town.

"What will happen to the girl?"

"I don't know. I wanted to talk to you about her. I would like her to stay with me for a while, and when the boarding school is completed, I'll pay for her board and education. She belongs to the city, I wouldn't like her to leave."

"But . . . you? I didn't think you cared for children, and you are too busy, she can stay with us."

"Please, Yardena! She wouldn't understand David, and I love the child. My house is large and I have a woman who cooks for me. Please let's try it."

"We have to tell her. I don't know how to."

I didn't have to tell her. When she saw me she knew. Her large eyes looked at me accusingly and she turned to run away.

"Wait!" I ran after her and caught her. The architect was watching us. How could I describe Shoshana's face? She didn't cry, or at least she shed no tears.

She was shaking and mumbling like a sick revengeful little animal. She hit me and kicked and pushed. She felt the death physically and was struggling with it. She expected it, but she was

a child and she did not know how to protest. I tried to talk to her but in vain. She scratched my arm and screamed.

"She is dead! She is dead! She is dead!"

David's mother was there watching me. How did David react to the death of his mother? Did he have any hand to bite? Did he have the strength to kick or the courage to howl? I gave up and let Shoshana run. The architect followed her and I went on to work. I told the children Shoshana's mother had died and the girls cried. There wasn't much point in trying to comfort them or myself, and the rest of the day was a dreary one. The children sat in corners quietly and drew circles and squares on white papers. Toward lunch Shoshana came back. Her hair was combed neatly and her face washed. The architect guided her to her place near the table, waved to me and walked away. Shoshana took her pencils out and printed her name in large square letters again and again till the page was full.

The next morning she left for Beersheba where her mother was buried, and when she came back with the evening bus the architect met her and took her to his house. Only a few weeks later I found her crying bitterly, and when I asked her what was the matter, she said, "My mother is dead."

I told Rita I had talked to Leni. She didn't protest. She knew I was going to.

"Did he say anything?" I asked her.

"No. He didn't mention it. He is kind and wonderful to me, but I haven't seen him for the last few days."

"Leni stopped being a stone-man."

"If he ever was one, but I know he is drinking again. I have to leave him alone, something is happening to him which he has to face alone, and I think it is something good."

Her belly was large and firm now, and her face had the unequaled beauty of a woman carrying a child in her womb. People noticed it and gossiped about it, but Rita was everybody's mother, and one more child wouldn't bother the large family. People knew it must have been Leni's responsibility and were wondering whether he would take a job and lead a regular life now that he had stopped being the stone-man. David spent hours at the Sunset Café, but Rita seldom sat with him. They seemed to converse without words, and I knew he was fond of her.

He was very busy in the week which followed Shoshana's mother's death, and was too tired to share my little problems. The change in him was enormous, and I couldn't grasp or explain it.

"You have changed, David."

"No, I'm just finding my place, at last."

"Are you happier now?"

"I am more free than before. I love the winter too."

"Are we getting any closer to each other?"

"You are changing too. I still think you should leave me. I think that at any rate you should go up north to Ron-Am and rest. Too many things are happening to you which I cannot help, and others which you don't even notice."

"I wish we spent more time together. Every moment with you is still a surprise to me, an unending mystery."

"Leni will be leaving the city tonight. I thought you might want to know."

I jumped up from my chair. "Leaving? Where for? And what about his child? We've got to stop him!"

"Don't jump up. There is no reason for panic. He is going because he has to go, and he will come back when the time comes. You can say goodbye to him, but don't try and stop him. He is larger than us, and this place is too small for him. When it fits his size he will be back."

"And Rita—and the child?"

"Don't worry. He has thought about them. Rita knows. Rita understands."

I didn't. I seemed to understand less and less in those few days, but I went to look for him to say goodbye.

He was not in his hut. The stones were like dumb orphans, children who were never really conceived. He was not at Rita's and she simply said, "Leni just left. He asked about you." I

went back to the house but he wasn't there either. Then I caught sight of him walking along the paved road which connected our city with the main road. He carried a small case with him and was wearing a new pair of sandals. He didn't look back as the city lights were switched on. I started running. When I was near enough I shouted his name but he didn't stop or turn until he could hear me breathing heavily and feel my hand on his arm.

I didn't know what to say. I didn't know why I ran. Here was Leni, beautiful and big, and I looked at him expecting him to talk to me. "Shalom, Yardenah," he said, and stroked my hair. "Don't say anything. I have got to go away now. Don't try to stop me, because you could."

"But why?"

"Many things I cannot explain, more things I simply don't know. When I find out I shall be back to tell you."

The horizon was in flames now, orange and purple flames, and the desert was tired.

"It is beautiful here, and I shall return. I shall return to Rita and my child, to you and David."

The asphalt road shivered with the wind and was lit by the last rays of the setting sun, like a long exclamation mark leading up to the hills in a straight line.

"I like you too much, I depend on David too

much. I love Rita and I want our child, but I have lost my stones and I have to go away."

"When will you be back?"

"You are a child. You ask me this question as if I was going on a business trip. I shall be back, Yardena. Take care of Rita, take care of David, and as for yourself—I still fear I was right the other night. I see destruction. I hope I am wrong." Leni kissed me and wiped away my tears. I could not speak or smile. He walked toward the hills, and I stood there for hours crying, until I felt David's hand touch me, and hugging me, he took me back home.

ASH

Leni left and the magic went with him. He carried away the illusions and the dreams and I was left with reality alone.

Suddenly, with a shock, I saw that the city was there. It had two main paved streets, square two-story houses painted white and pale blue and yellow, a barbershop and a cinema. Leni took the stones away and left the city soulless. The Sunset Café was there and so was Rita. Deep down inside Rita there was something of Leni left, but it had sunk deep and she wouldn't let me reach for it. There was a second café, where the cakes were not half as good as at Rita's, and offices.

When Leni left, my eyes opened and I saw that people were moving—little incomplete worlds walking early in the morning to the factory, little figures with shopping baskets. Leni took the silence with him and I heard the sounds. The buses, the dogs, the factory, children laughing or crying, the two taxi drivers arguing, the architect talking on the phone to Tel Aviv.

Leni was a giant and we all stood on tiptoe to try to be his height, but when he left we shrank back to normal size, and felt we were dwarfs.

Leni took the devil with him and maybe he even took the crater away because it disappeared.

The city ended with the last row of houses and beyond it was nothing. The asphalt road leading away from the city was clear and black and very much there, and his favorite red stone was on my desk, belonging to another world, reminding me of the crater and the dust, and looking out of place.

Leni took away my tears—I wanted to cry but couldn't.

"David, have you noticed the city? How large it is and citylike?"

"Of course. It has been like this since the first day."

"Do you miss Leni?"

"No. He was bound to leave. You loved him."

"No, I love you."

"Leni was me, too. I wonder if you'll go on loving me now that he has gone."

"Don't be silly. You've got nothing to do with one another. I had an affection for Leni, and he helped me to escape from myself and the world into his bizarre unreal existence. Maybe it's better that he has gone and we are left alone again."

"We were never alone, Yardená."

He said it as if he was happy about it. We were never alone. He was never with me. He gave me his body as a gift of no significance and his conversation as a lesson. He never told me he loved me and I dared not ask, I only hoped he thought he knew me, since I had given him everything.

The night after Leni left I had another nightmare . . .

We were walking in the snow, barefoot and naked. I could feel the piercing pain penetrate my bones and then I could feel nothing. We were pushed by bayonets and my mother collapsed and sank into the snow leaving no mark on it. My father held my hand and tried to warm it, but he was grabbed by a soldier and taken away. I screamed: *Father!* He didn't look back or answer. My sister froze, she was a blue statue, and when I pushed her she was hard and icy. David was there next to me. No, he wasn't there; I saw only his eyes. Alive and expressive and wistful, appearing and disappearing through the mist and the rain, touching my hand—his hand was warm, running away and coming back . . .

"Yardena . . . Wake up . . . Yardena!"

I looked up, covered with cold sweat, and David was holding my hands tightly.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I don't know. Please leave me. I want to go home."

"Relax. You were screaming for your parents . . . for me. What was it?" His voice was cold, frightened perhaps. He knows, I thought, then why does he ask?

I dressed and walked out. It was a cold, clear night and I couldn't ignore the city any more. It was earlier than I thought and there were

people in Rita's café, drinking brandy and listening to records. I walked to the kindergarten trying to think clearly. What is happening to me? Why? I was never there; I belong to the black earth and the jasmine flowers. I was never pushed with bayonets. My mother never sank beneath the white snow and my father always answered when I called him. Back in the house David was awake and restless. He wanted to reach me now, but I wouldn't let him.

"Let's not talk. You are too analytical about it. Let's sleep. I'm tired."

I was afraid to sleep and we lay awake the whole night, our bodies not touching and our souls hovering above the bed, each with a million hands trying to touch the other and not being able to, till dawn.

He spoke to me as the first light of dawn appeared. "Do you want me to go away?"

"No. You belong here and I love you. Loving you means being a part of you, snows, bayonets and all, but . . ."

"Yes . . ."

"But you don't love me, or you would become part of me and smell the jasmine and let Shoshana come to the house when she wants to. I am afraid."

"Don't rationalize. I want to see Shoshana; one day I shall be able to. I want to feel the earth. I don't want you to feel the snows. What does it

mean, want? I want to live, Yardena, but I cannot work at it."

"You don't love me. You have no warmth for me. You're kind—yes, but I hate your kindness. It's like being polite. I want warmth in return for my love. I want a frivolous word at times. I want a joke, laughter . . . David, I want you to tell me you like the dress I am wearing, the sheen of my hair, my voice . . ."

"But I feel much more. I never thought we needed these conventional gestures. You are bigger than that. I adore your person, I respect your mind, and I understand your heart. Why is the color of your dress important?"

"I am not bigger or smaller than life size, nor am I above conventions. I am sorry I mentioned it. You are not capable of conventional gestures. Don't try. I ought to adjust, I know." I laughed nervously, but he didn't smile.

He tried to kiss me but I pushed him away. I felt he was trying to do me a favor again.

I went into the kitchen and started to prepare breakfast. A glass slipped from my hand to the floor and broke.

"What's the matter with you?"

"I am sorry."

"You should sleep at night!"

Yes, I thought. I ought to sleep at night and not indulge in silly dreams. I should sleep for many

hours and see sunny pictures full of joy and love. I should make love at night and feel wanted, desired, and then sleep well again and wake up with a kiss. How easy it all sounded.

I wanted to tell him we ought to get a second bed. I wanted to tell him not to touch me unless he truly wanted me. I wanted to tell him to go away and look for me, and when he met me to come back; but only then, with living eyes and sensing hands. Through the split curtain separating the kitchen from the room I could see him dressing and the numbers on his arm were never clearer. Each number radiated distance and each dot signified terror. For months I hadn't noticed it, and now it seemed that the number was tattooed on his chest, on his face, across the bed, engraved into the wall and on the ceiling, painted on the floor—whole, among the broken pieces of glass I carefully gathered.

But the children's faces were clean and pure, and their drawings were bright with red and green pastels. We went for a walk in the town, holding hands and singing, and I told them a long story about a butterfly called Riko.

In the afternoon I slept, a nervous but dreamless sleep, and toward evening a strange fear gathered in me. I was afraid of the night, for the first time. The night I loved, the blackness dotted with stars and secrets was an enemy now. The

moon was a wicked unwelcome guest and the sunset was Leni's departure. I tried to prolong the moments, to gather within me the last tails of the sunbeams. I shouldn't think. It is just another night. We eat, talk, make love, sleep well, just another good night. Why the fear? These clear desert nights which I love, tonight is just one more of them.

I went to see Rita. She was baking, and the wonderful smell of dough filled the little kitchen.

"Rita, do you miss Leni much?"

"Of course, Yarden. But he will come back. He is changing. I helped him to change."

"Then why did he go away?"

"To get rid of some of the load he carried. It would have been embarrassing for him to do it here, depending on me. He went away but left a home behind, and when he comes back he will come to stay."

"How did you do it?"

"Patience, mainly. By leaving him alone. By showing him that I could do without him; by not needing him and yet wanting him."

"But then, it is easy for you. You have the patience because you know he loves you. I know David never will."

"You are wrong, of course. He does love you. You'll find it out one day. Why don't you have children?"

"He doesn't want children. He thinks we have no right to bring new creatures into a rotten world."

"That's naive and childish. The only thing that could help him is fatherhood. You should insist."

I left the café. Marko was sitting outside, gazing into the dark main street.

"Good evening, Marko," I said. He didn't hear me and I didn't mind.

There was a light on in our house. I would leave the light on tonight, I thought. "No, you won't," David said. "It's an illusion. It is dark and you know it is. You are not a baby, and you are not alone. We shall go through it all. You needn't fear; we are strong and we don't need the light."

He put it out. The darkness had substance. Liquid warm weird substance. His hand on my body was darkness. His lips were black. I trembled.

"Something is happening to you. Do you hate me?"

"I love you."

"Good night." When I kissed him lightly my lips were black too.

We made love. He tried to please me, he almost tried to need me. For a second he seemed to be there with me, and the darkness didn't matter, but then he was gone again and asleep.

That night I dreamed of my own death. My body was burnt black and it was stretched on the

white snow. My mother's tears slipped on it as on a smooth glassy surface and my sister was again a statue of ice beside me. Then came the flames. First from a distance, yellow and bright, almost like neon lighting. The flames danced high and tall like a sandstorm and turned red. They were black! Black flames in a white night, melting the corpse of my sister and approaching me at a slow maddening pace. I wanted to move but I was dead. My mother's hair caught fire and her tears were black flames on my body. The flames came nearer and I couldn't feel them. Then there were only ashes scattered on the snow and I woke up.

"You weren't there," I said to David. He was asleep, or pretended to be. "You weren't there!" I shook him. "Where were you?"

"Asleep," he said.

I put on the lights. My eyes were red as if I had been crying in my sleep. "I can't stand it. I want to sleep. David! I want to sleep. I am going over to Rita's. She will tell me a funny story and I will be able to sleep then. We'll talk about it tomorrow."

I dressed hurriedly and he watched me. "Don't go, Yardena. I cannot sleep without you."

"I cannot sleep with you."

"Please don't go. You cannot escape what is happening to you now, to me, to us. Come to bed."

I obeyed. In spite of myself, against my wishes.

He had a way of ordering me about which I could not resist. His voice had the clarity of a command from God. I was too tired to resist.

"Shoshana will come to the house for dinner. The architect will be away. She might sleep here."

"Don't do it!"

"Oh, yes I will. There has to be some balance. I want a child, David."

"Our children would have nightmares."

"No. Our children would drive ours away. Good night."

Even Marko asked me: "What is the matter?" So people did notice the change. Was it in my eyes? Had they lost their expressions and reactions? No, David would have told me.

"You are not yourself," the architect said. "Maybe you need a vacation."

"Who am I then?" I smiled.

He looked composed and subtle. He had changed too. "I want to talk to you," he said. "I'll buy you a cheesecake at Rita's."

We sat facing each other. I didn't want to talk, and was reluctant to listen.

"It is David. You are good for him, but he is not for you. You must leave him. Find someone happy, strong and normal. Find someone who knows how to give. It is not my business, Yardena, but I knew it from the beginning. You are not yourself. You have lost the vividness and laughter which was so wonderful when we first came here.

You are letting him destroy you. He doesn't want to and so he will destroy himself in the process. You've got to break away."

"I love him."

"Yes." He was sad now . . . "Once I thought this was the answer, justification, and cure for everything. Love cannot go wrong . . . But oh yes it can, so easily. Of course you love him, but does he love you? Is loving only giving? Does he want your love? You have told yourself too many times that you love him. Maybe if you stop trying to convince yourself you'll discover the emotion has worn rather thin."

"He had a rough time. It takes time to recover."

"So that's it. I hate to be bitter, but don't play at soul-saving. It's a deadly, unworthy game, Yarden. Don't try to correct evils which have penetrated to depths you can never reach. When I came to the city I thought I was going to save my people, plant shining milestones along the tearful road of Jewish history. You know something? They have planted a beautiful flower in me, but *they* did it. David is uprooting the flower in you instead."

"You are unfair. I love him, but not because of his past."

"You try to replace the family he has lost. You try to replace the God he rejected. Instead he is dragging you into his cycle. Look at yourself! You

are thin. You've grown years older since you met him. You are serious, nervous and melancholy. I hate to tell you this, but if something doesn't happen you won't be able to go on working with the children."

I got up to go. This could not be true. He is trying to frighten me. He is jealous. He is stupid. I love the children. Shoshana is coming to dinner tonight; I'll go and fetch her. The children love me, maybe David loves me. It is simply a bad week.

The architect apologized and left. Marko asked again what was the matter. I smiled at him and hurried to Shoshana's house.

She was waiting for me. I took her hand in mine and we walked along the main street licking ice cream and chatting.

"Will Uncle David be there?" she asked.

"Yes, Shoshana. Why?"

"He still frightens me. But I know he is good."

"He is very good. You needn't be frightened."

"He looks at me, and looks and looks, and I think he wants to cry when he looks. Tell him not to look at me."

"I will. What would you like to eat?" She told me and we stopped at the grocer's for food. I added some sweets to her list, a bottle of wine, and because it was Friday, and Shoshana came from a traditional home, I bought two Sabbath candles.

David was not in the house, and I asked Shoshana to paint while I cooked the dinner. It had to be a turning point; something must happen.

A white tablecloth, the two candles, the bottle of red wine and a fresh white loaf of bread . . . Shoshana was helping me, arranging the flowers—flowers which were brought from the north every Friday. She was excited, happy, and her excitement was contagious. Surely it would affect David somehow.

“When will he come?” she asked.

“Any moment now.”

Still, there was something eerie in the air. As if it were all made of spider’s web, as if a dying man were making a last grave effort to hold onto life. Under it all, between the wine bottle and the flower vase, between the hard wood of the table and the white tablecloth, between the two white swanlike candles, fear was scattered. A thin layer, but it was there, and it had a smell.

Suddenly I froze. I thought I saw David’s face in the window. It couldn’t be him! He would come in. Yet nobody had eyes like his! I gave Shoshana something to do in the kitchen and went out. David was staring through the window, examining the inside with the intensity of a hungry man. He didn’t hear me, and he started when I touched his shoulder.

“Come in and eat, please.”

"No. I cannot. It is too much like home. I can see Mother's hands blessing the candles."

I was hurt. He didn't like it to be different and he didn't want it to be the same. I was stubborn this time. "You are coming in. Even if it is our last night together. And you will bless the wine. I shall light the candles. You will be nice to Shoshana and you will live through it. Call it a sorrowful game if you like. Call me insensitive and stupid but you are coming in."

To my great surprise he stroked my hair and walked into the house.

It was artificial. Not for Shoshana, not for David, but for me. These bright candles didn't really mean anything to me. The wine tasted good, but it was not Sabbath wine; just good dry red wine. I could not create the right atmosphere because it was too late to start. I played the game. I served a good meal, I pretended to be relaxed and happy. I blamed my mother for all the candles she never lighted, and my father for never having blessed the red wine. But tradition in my family was buried in the black earth and suffocated with the smell of jasmine.

I put Shoshana to bed and kissed her good night.

"Will Uncle David tell me a story?"

"Yes," he said. I left to wash the dishes, and when I came back Shoshana was asleep and David was crying.

"What did you tell her?"

"Oh, an old tale, funny and happy. Don't worry, she liked it."

"Why are you crying then?"

"Don't ever do that to me again. Promise! You are very young—you don't understand that by evoking the good and gentle memories you bring to life everything else as well, and next to the whiteness of the tablecloth the flames look blacker than ever. Why can't you relax?"

"How?"

"Just live and be normal. Not think, or try, or make efforts. Just go to work in the morning, sleep at night, avoid the afternoon wind . . ."

"I wish I could. You don't help me much, do you? We talk too much. Anyway, thanks for being helpful tonight."

The architect's warning about the work terrified me and for a few weeks I played a game. When people were around, in the street, in the shops, in the café, I was the old Yardena again. I laughed and joked and displayed interest, and Marko said: "I see you are better again." I lived through the days with a smile and a song. But when night came, and the city became small and secretive, I returned to myself. I went home and hung the mask next to David's overalls, and the smile was gone till the morning. I slept very little. I had repeated nightmares and we hardly ever talked.

Not talking was almost comfortable. It meant

not discussing ourselves; it meant avoiding sorrows. We could never talk about everyday things. They seemed insignificant. Will there be war? David didn't care. He simply said he was not going to go through another war. Will Leni come back? So many of my remarks were left in mid-air, so many of my questions were unanswered. Silence was like food and sleep for us, and became a habit stronger than ourselves.

Why did it go on then? Love became a habit too. There was always the illusion that the things we did bother to say were of great importance. Every touch tripled its meaning, and the slightest sign of warmth could keep me going for weeks.

There were fifty children now in the kindergarten and each of them was a substitute and a reward.

One morning I had to go to Tel Aviv for new toys. I went alone, taking my mask with me. I checked into a hotel, gave a good dress to be pressed and awaited the evening with a strange anxiety. I wanted this gay carefree city to melt my melancholy, and I was going to help it.

I put on the dress, low-cut and flattering, and walked into the main street. Men watched me. Was this what I wanted? Not Marko, or the architect, but men with eyes and lips and hands. I walked aimlessly, on and on and on . . .

Music! I wanted loud music! I went to the best restaurant in town, ordered a bottle of wine and

a good meal. The music was loud and someone asked me to dance. I accepted. My body felt light and my head heavy.

"Your name?" "Yardena." "Are you from here?" "Yes." "Why are you alone?" "My boyfriend left today." "He is stupid. Come and have a drink?"

I paid for my dinner and we walked out. I didn't know his name. I didn't know what he looked like. I didn't know what he was wearing. He talked. He drank. His hands which were dry when we danced were sweaty now. "Would you come home with me?" "Yes."

We went to his house. I didn't notice its look or odors, but it had a smell about it which I did remember for a good many days. The smell of lovemaking.

"Another drink?" "Yes." "You are not the talkative kind . . ." "Not much to talk about." "You are young." "Yes."

He undressed. His arms were hairy. No number. I undressed. The black earth, the sweat, the jasmine, the dust—it was all gone. He told me I was beautiful. He told me something about my skin. He wanted me, and I wanted to be wanted.

He made love to me. He excited me.

"Why are you crying?"

"Nothing. I enjoyed it."

"Do you want to sleep here?"

"No. Good night."

I dressed and went out, and walked back to

the main street, to the lights, on and on and on . . .

I went back to our city. I never told David about it, because he would have pitied me, and pity was the one thing that would have driven me to complete depression. Were I to tell him he would have said: Silly child! He had no real jealousy in him; I didn't want to arouse his jealousy either. That night in Tel Aviv was free of him. He was never there; it was not clean enough for him. If Leni had been in the city, I would have told him.

The days passed like hallucinations, and the nights brought nightmares or sleeplessness. I could no longer distinguish between the past and the present. What had happened to me years ago and what had happened to David? Who was my mother, or his, my sister—was she alive? Marko, was he alive? The border between reality and dreams disappeared gradually, and the only thing that kept me going was the children. There were a few moments every day, when I returned from work, when things were clear and calm. Then I'd write, or try and work it all out. But it didn't matter much. I was walking down toward the crater, along a steep path, and I knew no other way. My love was burning and strong and hopeless, and as long as he was there—my enemy, my lord, my friend—nothing mattered.

No, it was not identification with him; it went

beyond that. I lived his past, but not his present. Every nightmare I had, meant one less for him. He grew tanned and put on weight. He was almost handsome, and very tranquil. He understood what was happening, and he treated me like a patient.

I lived a double life and both elements were complete. I was irritated by the living; food had no taste—what right had I to eat? Beauty made no sense—what right had I to beauty? I cut my hair short one day and burst into tears at the sight of the black locks piled near the bed. David kept my hair among his things, together with his mother's ring and some family photos.

It was almost a year since we had met, and the city meant more to him than to me. They were going to celebrate the city's anniversary soon and David took an active part in the preparations. So did I, with the children, but it wasn't genuine. I'd have given anything to turn the clock back to the first sandstorm, the first plants, the first cup of coffee Rita made. Where was Leni? Nobody seemed to know.

My apathy was not constant, though. With other people I displayed an interest in everything, but the moment we were alone the world was one big emptiness, at times a ball of flame, at times endless fields of snow. Even the corpses didn't seem horrible any more; they were too familiar.

David told me beautiful stories and made me smile. He never told me he loved me . . .

He talked about his work, about my work and the children.

One night, after we made love, he said to me: "Yardena. Do you still want a child? I do."

The tears choked my words and I searched for his hand. I stroked his hair, his arms, his back. I didn't want a child. I was afraid of children; but he felt so close to me, so very close.

"Do you? Don't cry. You would make a good mother."

"No, David. It is too late. My children would have nightmares. Give us time. Help me, please, help me . . ."

Crying, I fell asleep in his arms. In the morning, again, nothing mattered.

DUST

The city was yellow, and its substance was dust. Its pulse beat was infinity, and it was one year old. It had a name and an identity, it had meaning and shape, and it spread in white and blue squares as far as the eye could see.

It had sounds and smells and the dust hid between courtyards, among pavement stones, in women's hair, on the leaves of the trees we had planted a year ago.

They were building a road down to the crater now, and I didn't dare watch them at work. Leni had never come back, and Rita was pregnant with his child, knowing he was bound to return because this was his home.

The desert yielded to the humans and the asphalt arrested the sands; the huge animal I loved proved to be tamable and a new beauty of frames and colors emerged, a beauty my eye could not accept.

For a few weeks I thought things were changing for me. I had a few restful nights, and David was kind and gentle, almost loving. I was good with the children and even Marko told me I looked better. The architect was suspicious of this sudden change and stared at me oddly in a way I didn't like.

There were no castles, no springs, no fountains, but the city was not ugly. It was only that it was there.

One night it all came back. We were talking about the future, a child maybe, maybe even a move to a new city which would be built near a southern crater, a visit to my village—I hadn't seen my family for a long time—when David said:

"You see, you made it. You are much better now. You don't know how difficult it was for me, what an imposition other people's emotions are, how difficult it is to be loved." He said it quietly; perhaps he didn't even realize the cruelty of his words . . . "You see, Yardená, when I imposed my suffering on you, it was real. You almost helped me to return to life . . . But when you suffered, there was something artificial about it. After all, you didn't really go through it. You don't really know what it was like. It was a way of identifying yourself with me. But it doesn't work. You pushed me away."

"I did. I see. So we haven't met yet?"

"You shouldn't think about it like that. Let's make love."

"No!" I screamed. "We shall not make love."

"Yes we shall!"

He grabbed me by the shoulder and pushed me to the bed. His eyes were burning now and his lips looked cruel and stubborn.

"Don't touch me! Let me go!" I was in hysterics

now. His touch repelled me and he was someone else.

A new sensation choked my throat, a physical fear, a dreadful presentiment, as if I was about to be raped by a monstrous stranger. Now I noticed his back was hairy. Now I noticed his ears were too large for his skull. Now I noticed the smell of his armpits, and his body looked ugly.

My saint, my martyr, became a man, the man I wanted him to be. His hands drank my skin the way I wanted them to all along. His lips were passionate, hungry, searching and demanding, and his body sought mine with a tremble I had never known before. I felt sick. I was cheated.

"Don't dare! I will hate it!"

He slapped my face. Once, and again, and I stopped screaming. He was Leni now, inside me, and I felt nothing. Self-pity and agony pushed their way to my eyes.

All those nights I lay awake waiting for the liquid in his veins to turn into blood, boiling and red. All those long walks during which I imagined such moments of lust. All the prayers to the God of lovers begging him to plant this same drive in David's body.

The God listened, and time and patience worked their way into those hands whose touch I now resented.

When it was over I did not want to know the man who lay there.

"We shall have a child," he said.

"Never," I whispered.

And they were there. His father, stern and sad. His mother, gentle and warm. Avram and Rivka. They were there again. But they were closer to me. They smelled of caves and their clothes were covered with ashes. They stood so close to me I could touch them. His mother offered me her hand. Avram and Rivka came nearer to me and hugged me, and his father whispered, "Come, child, we have waited for you for so long . . ."

I knew I had to join them. I knew there was no other way. They were closer to me than David was; they understood better. His mother would teach me to bless the candles and his father would say: *Next year in Jerusalem*. The ashes would cover my dress and I should have the smell of caves. Then I would not be ashamed of the bread I was eating, or of laughter or joy, because then I would not need all these.

I walked down toward the crater, and Leni wasn't there; David wasn't there; the devil was gone and God never appeared; but my conscience was waiting to be collected, and next to it stood this chorus of the living dead. I knew the way, and perhaps I could guide them to a resting place, to the Mount of Olives maybe, or Jerusalem, or my village. Perhaps they had been waiting for *me* all this time; perhaps they could not leave without me.

They were building a road down to the crater now; I had to hurry because the asphalt would frighten them; we shall have to leave before the celebrations start; there is no time to lose, no time to say goodbye.

The next day, when David left for work, I knew what I must do: I knew what I had to do. David understood death better than life. The people he loved were dead. If I were to join them I would meet him, meet his heart, meet his love. He could give everything to the dead, he felt indebted to the dead, I must join them . . . and take them away from him so he could sleep . . .

Everything was moving in circles that day. I didn't go to work. I lay on my bed talking to myself, writing, dreaming. Was there a city outside? Who was David? Who am I? Why did I never suffer?

Why did not one burn me alive?

His father stands next to me and he is saying a prayer.

His mother pulls me toward her with icy fingers . . .

Yardena was found dead in the house by David when he came back from work that evening.

The whole night he sat and watched her, un-

able to pray, unable to cry, unable to fight with God who was there. Her face was relaxed, her eyes open. He waited the whole night for her to speak his name, and he didn't dare utter hers.

He fell asleep at dawn and he could see her moving away from him, together with Avram and Rivka. He didn't try to stop them; he knew they were gone—forever. He knew they had met, he knew it was too late, and when he woke up he took her body and carried it outside.

People gathered behind him and dared not ask. He was crying now and he stopped at the Sunset Café. Rita screamed and fainted; people took the body from him and he sat near Marko—lean and strong and alive.

"You have killed her," Marko said. He was not accusing; it was a statement.

"It wasn't me. They did it. They didn't have enough—maybe one was missing in their books. So they took her away. She chose to go and fill the gap."

"Yes, you killed her. You could have saved her, couldn't you? It's gone on for a long time."

"A long time . . . Yes. Generations. It was a pure death."

Children strolled to the kindergarten. Small people hurried to the factory. The taxi drivers argued. Leni came back. Leni knew. Leni had known all along.

By evening the whole city was in mourning.

The first birth and the first death are landmarks for new cities.

People came to talk to David and they had nothing to say. Yardena's parents were there. They gathered her things up in silence and cried. They talked to him and he didn't hear, but he smelled the black earth they brought with them.

The funeral was simple and short. In the architect's plans there was a large blue square marked CEMETERY, and the first grave was dug just outside it. The sand mocked the spades, and the workers almost gave up; the earth didn't want to accept this body. They slipped it in and covered it. Sand pouring over a body makes no sound; it slides in leaving no marks, no gaps. Graves dug in black earth are different; the clods make an accusing sound, and the fresh black mounds on top of graves is blacker than black earth. Sand makes a whispering threatening sound and the wind levels the mound and nothing remains . . .

They put a square marble block on top of the grave. And Leni put his red stone on top of the marble. And David sat the whole night watching the grave.

He felt no guilt. His eyes burned with a wild fire and his heartbeats echoed in the crater below. He didn't want to quarrel with God, he didn't want to think; he wanted to love.

His parents were gone, with Avram, Rivka and Yardena. They had left him all alone for the first

time, and it was loneliness he had always wanted. That was the freedom he had sought.

He took his bag. He left Yardená's hair and the family photos in the room, and he walked away along the asphalt road toward the horizon. His eyes didn't reflect the scenery; they reflected his thoughts and feelings. And the dust covered the grave, the marble, the red stone, and his foot-marks.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

YAËL DAYAN was born in Febraury, 1939, in Nahalal, a co-operative agricultural settlement between Haifa and Nazareth. A third-generation Israeli, she lived in the village until 1949, when her father, General Moshe Dayan, became Commander of Jerusalem. The family moved to Jerusalem, and later to Tel Aviv when General Dayan became Commander in Chief of the Israeli Army. She started her writing career when in high school, writing a column for a Hebrew evening paper and reporting for youth magazines. Before joining the army at the age of seventeen and a half, she had completed a three-year course at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Faculty of International Affairs. During her two years of army service, first as a recruit, then as corporal, cadet, and finally a lieutenant, Miss Dayan wrote her first novel, *New Face in the Mirror*; the book has been published in fourteen languages. After her army service, she began her second novel, *Envy the Frightened*. She has traveled alone to the Far East, from Iran to Japan to Africa, from Lagos to Dakar, and to the United States, where she has lectured to Jewish groups and book clubs every year for the past four years.

Yaël Dayan lives in Israel with her parents and two brothers, Ehud, twenty-one, and Assaf, seventeen. Her father is now the Minister of Agriculture, and her mother, Ruth, heads the Israeli village-craft industries organization. Army life inspired *New Face in the Mirror*; the young generation in Israel gave the theme to *Envy the Frightened*; the desert background which she experienced is the source of *Dust*. Both *Envy the Frightened* and *Dust* were written in Greece, where Miss Dayan spends several months every year. She writes in English and speaks several other languages fluently.



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life — Leni, mysterious and perceptive, who preferred his stone collection to the demands of human relationships; and Rita, the Hungarian immigrant who tried desperately to win his love. And there is David, sorrowful and impenetrable, whose suffering was far beyond anything Yardena could comprehend or even imagine. Warned a thousand times that her love for David could lead only to destruction, Yardena tried everything in her power to reach him, to help him laugh, to make him respond to warmth and love.

Writing of the country she knows so well, Yaël Dayan brilliantly evokes a harsh and beautiful landscape as she weaves a stirring and dramatic piece of fiction. Told with a simplicity, a freshness, and a passion that are peculiarly Miss Dayan's own, this is a haunting picture of people striving vigorously to create a homeland, and an unforgettable story of a consuming love.

Yaël Dayan, the daughter of Israel's Minister of Agriculture, was born in Israel in 1939. After completing a three-year course at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, she served two years in the Israeli army, during which time she wrote her first novel, *New Face in the Mirror*. She has traveled and lectured extensively throughout the world. Both *Envy the Frightened* and *Dust* were written in Greece, where Miss Dayan spends several months each year. She writes in English and speaks several languages fluently.



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